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Rekha M. Chennattu

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Towards an Indian Biblical Hermeneutics

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Editorial

The quest for an Indian biblical exegesis is not a recent phenomenon. Many attempts have been made to revive the ancient Indian hermeneutics of “story telling” and to work out a methodology for an Indian biblical hermeneutics. One approach tried to see the interconnection between Hindu scriptures and Christian biblical narratives. Another approach followed the *dhvani* (literally, echo, sound or resonance) method for biblical exegesis. More recent approaches display a special sensitivity to the Indian social realities like mass poverty, social discrimination and political corruption. Among these readings, three perspectives stand out: (1) Readings from social and political perspectives; (2) Dalit readings from the point of view of the socially marginalized outcasts or Dalits (literally, oppressed); (3) Feminist readings from the perspective of the experience of women in India.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* takes up once again the challenge of developing an Indian biblical hermeneutics. Peter Haokip develops a Tribal hermeneutics of dialogue for the interpretation of the Bible. The author reads the Exodus story of the people of Israel (Exodus 1–15) from a tribal perspective. He proposes that a tribal reading of the Bible, influenced by the values of the tribal communities such as equality, closeness to nature, non-competitive collaboration with one another, etc., will bring about a refreshing newness to a world endangered by greed, individualism and exploitation of the land and of human beings.

Paul Kalluveettil offers a new interpretation of the parable of Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:1–12). After surveying the literary devices and exegetical annotations, he explores the world of implied meanings of the parable and draws out the implications of the text for India today. Kalluveettil challenges the many dehumanizing practices of the Catholic

Church in Kerala/India and invites all to embrace the vision of a cosmic family shown by the way of life of “the poor man” in the parable.

Peter Ignatius undertakes an intertextual reading of 1 Kings 21 from an Indian perspective. The main characters of the story of 1 Kings 21 – King Ahab, Queen Jezebel and Naboth – are compared with the patrons of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and the poor land owners in India. He draws a parallel between the way Queen Jezebel had usurped the land of Naboth and the way the patrons of SEZ are usurping the land of the poor in India.

Henry Pattarumadathil explores the Gospel of Matthew and highlights Jesus’ insistence on right action over adherence to rites and doctrines. Underlining the hard realities of the Indian Church predominantly favouring orthodoxy rather than orthopraxis, Pattarumadathil systematically and progressively demonstrates Jesus’ stand for compassionate inclusivism and against contemptuous exclusivism, for exceeding righteousness as opposed to slavish legalism, for authenticity in place of hypocrisy, and for genuine deeds instead of empty words.

Pauline Chakkalakal rereads the command of Jesus – “go and tell” -- in Matthew 28:10 and John 20:17 with the instruction of Paul – “women should be silent” – in 1 Cor 14:34-35 from a feminist perspective. The author examines Jesus’ commission to women to announce the good news taking the Semitic background into account, and Paul’s controversial text on women’s silence in the light of the socio-cultural context of the Corinthian community. Her study shows that the mind of Jesus is in Paul’s writings, and spells out the implications of these teachings for leadership in the Church.

It is our hope that the articles published in this issue of *Jeevadhara* will stimulate further discussion and contribute to the development of Indian readings of the Bible.

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A Tribal Reading of Exodus 1–15

Peter Haokip

Peter Haokip reads the Exodus story of the people of Israel (Exodus 1–15) from a tribal perspective. He first explores the way ancient Israel appropriated the experience of the Exodus event, by identifying three important aspects of the story – the liberation of Israel from isolation, the identity of Israel as God's people, and the leader of Israel (Moses). Haokip then tries to show parallels between the exodus story of Israel and that of the North East people in India. Finally the author proposes a hermeneutics of dialogue, which is very close to the tribal culture and ethos, for the interpretation of the Bible.

Introduction

The late Father George M Soares-Prabhu, Professor of Scripture in Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune, for over two decades, devoting an issue of *Jeevadhara* to “Tribal Values in the Bible”, pointed out that the Bible is “particularly responsive to a tribal interpretation”, and is “steeped in tribal culture. The Old Testament expresses the faith of the tribes of Israel, and remains faithful to its tribal ethos even when the tribal structure was replaced by a monarchy. The teaching of Jesus can be seen as a return to this tribal ethos”. And while lamenting the difficulty faced by scholars to read the Bible through tribal eyes, Soares hoped that this difficulty could be overcome when Biblical scholars from tribal background address the issue. He had also hoped for a future issue of *Jeevadhara* presenting “distinctive voices from the

tribal world".¹ I would like to present this article both as a tribute to and a fulfilment of the dream of Fr. George M. Soares-Prabhu, a teacher who had initiated me into the methods of biblical studies.

The term tribal² has become highly pejorative and derogatory. Despite the fact that many of the criteria for being called tribal have disappeared,³ the different ethnic groups of Northeast India are still derogatorily labelled tribals. All races and communities of humanity in some stage of their history qualified to be called tribals and indeed they were. It sounds strange that some groups are condemned to be called tribals for ever. If, in reading the Bible the tribal way, the word tribal is used in a derogatory sense, it will be a dishonour to the liberating power of the Word of God. Hence, we use the term tribal in the sense of a people whose culture is characterized by "extraordinary values of solidarity with nature, egalitarianism, a non-competitive collaboration with one another, and a filial (not mercantile) relationship with the land".⁴ It is a reading of the Bible that calls on the indigenous peoples to be true to the values rooted in their culture. It offers others "a valuable alternative to the rampant individualism, unchecked greed, aggressive competitiveness, and growing alienation from nature which is leading the post-modern world to nuclear and ecological disaster".⁵ It is the right way towards discovering the true values of the Bible.

One of the major concerns of the tribals of the Northeast is the protection and preservation of their cultural and ethnic identity. In fact, "the various movements in the Northeast have all to do with identity."⁶ Even the whole twentieth century has been called an ethnic century because the conflicts and claims were at least partly organized in terms

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- 1 George M. Soares-Prabhu, "Tribal Values in India," *Jeevadhara* xx1v/140 (1994): 88.
 - 2 I am mainly referring to the hill tribes of Northeast India. Hopefully some features of these will be applicable to other tribal groups too.
 - 3 Cf. V. Xaxa, "Tribes, Conversion and the Sangh Parivar," *JPJS* 3/1 (2000):23-25.
 - 4 Soares, *Tribal Values*, 84
 - 5 Soares, *Tribal Values*, 84.
 - 6 B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development* (Delhi: Knark Publishers, 1996), 285.

of ethnic or racial identity.⁷ The Hebrews of old also, perhaps, had faced a similar situation. Exodus is the story of their struggle to preserve their identity. This article will first attempt to show how the Exodus event was read by the ancient Hebrews as the founding event of their nation. It will then indicate possible tribal readings of the same.

1. Israel's Reading of Exodus

Ancient Israelites were keenly aware that: "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you – for you were the fewest of all peoples" (Deut 7: 7; see also 26: 6-10).⁸ Exodus is the story of how the Lord set his heart on the Israelites and made them his "treasured possession out of all the peoples" (Exod 19: 6).

1.1. Exodus in Israel's Collective Memory

Apart from the narrative itself the Exodus theme is referred to about one hundred and twenty times in the Hebrew Bible.⁹ The story "has been read and reread, used and reused throughout history by many different people."¹⁰ The Exodus theme is one of the fundamental ways in which Israel's religious life is imagined.¹¹ The experience of past generations and the faith of contemporary generations merged with one another in the Exodus story.¹²

Much of the legal material of the Pentateuch is also grounded in the memory of Israel's enslavement in Egypt, and Yahweh's deliverance is the motive for obeying the law. For the prophets, Exodus was not an

7 Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hatmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World* (London: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 1.

8 All biblical quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise mentioned.

9 Hoffman Y., *The Doctrine of Exodus in the Bible* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1983), no page; see also Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996), 2.

10 Laurel A. Dykstra, *Set Them Free: The Other Side of Exodus* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 26.

11 Marcus J. aBorg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), 121-122

12 Stephen J Binz, *The God of Freedom and Life: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press), 8

isolated event, but Yahweh continues to be with the Israelites. The Psalms too celebrate the mighty warrior God, protector and deliverer of Israel.¹³

The Exodus story was an experience indelibly stamped on Israel's memory and imagination, ineradicably inscribed upon the conscience and understanding of the people. It became a permanent symbol in the Israelite national consciousness. It was ever new, ever imposing itself afresh upon the collective mind and memory, so that the epic of the Exodus nurtured the culture and religion over the millennia."¹⁴ Exodus became "the foundational event in which Israel came to know Yahweh and to know themselves as a people."¹⁵

1.2. *Israel's Reading of Exodus 1:1–15:21*

The book of Exodus is broadly divided into (1) 1:1–15:21: containing the story of Israel in Egypt, the oppression, the struggle for freedom and the final liberation; (2) 15:22–18:27: the account of the journey from the Red Sea to Sinai; (3) 19–24: the covenant at Sinai and the prescriptions of the law, and (4) 25–40: the command to build the tabernacle and its implementation.¹⁶ Themewise, the Exodus contains stories of the birth of Israel, liberation, revelation of Yahweh, covenant, Yahweh's kingship and the tabernacle.¹⁷ We shall focus on the first part as the birth story of Israel as a nation, and its liberation from slavery. Exodus 1–15 can further be divided in the following manner: (1) 1:1–7 is the story of Israel in Egypt; (2) 1:8–25, the oppression of Israel; (3) 2–4, birth, call and commissioning of Moses; (4) 5–11, the ten plagues, and (5) 12:1–15:21, the Passover, Exodus and liberation.

1.2.1. *The Birth of a People (1:1–7)*

Exodus 1:1–7 serves as a transitional section. Beginning with the tradition of the patriarchs (v.1), these verses move to that of the nation (v. 7). The fusion of the two traditions shows that Exodus is a direct continuation of the history that began in Genesis.¹⁸ The words of Exodus

13 Dykstra, *Set them Free*, 27

14 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 2

15 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 7.

16 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 6

17 Dykstra, *Set Them Free*, 24.

18 Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), 2.

1: 7 that the Israelites were “fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them”, echoes the words of Genesis (1: 28 and 9:1).

The narratives in Genesis dwell on individuals and the fortunes of a single family. The Book of Exodus sets in motion the process of the fulfilment of these promises.¹⁹ In God’s revelation to Moses as the God of the patriarchs, the phrase “the Israelite people” appears for the first time (Exod 3: 7, 15, 16; 1: 9). The Book also opens with the list of the original seventy pioneers, a clear reference to Genesis 46:8-27. What God said to Moses in 3:16 is an echo of Joseph’s dying words (Gen 50: 24). Joseph’s authorship of the phrase explicitly cited in Exodus 3: 19 and the threefold reference to Joseph in the beginning of Exodus show a close link between the two books.²⁰

1.2.2. *Oppression (1:8-14)*

The well-being and prosperity of the Israelites in Egypt was largely due to how Joseph stood in the eyes of the Egyptian rulers (Genesis (37-47). The new ruler of Egypt does not “know Joseph”. He is not even given a name. He seems to be presented as a symbol for the anti-creation forces of death which takes on the God of life.²¹ Unwittingly, however, the king becomes the first to recognize the children of Israel as a “people”, giving them a status like his own people. By echoing the words of the narrator in verse 7 and exaggerating the numbers, the king highlights the fulfilment of God’s promises (Gen 18: 18). The king’s plan to act ‘shrewdly’ appears foolish. The more he oppressed the Israelites they increased all the more (v. 12).²² Israel must pass through adversity in order to enjoy the fulfilment of the promises. Verses 13-14 stress the intensity of Israel’s oppression.²³ The language of affliction and burden becomes a recurrent motif and is incorporated in Israel’s confession of faith (Deut 26: 5; 1 Sam 12: 8), and it appears in the laws too (Exod 22: 21-24). It is not to parade its past suffering to induce pity or guilt; rather it is to identify themselves with those who suffer.²⁴

19 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 5.

21 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 27.

23 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 13.

20 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 6.

22 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 28.

24 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 29-30

1.2.3. Threat of Genocide (1:15-22)

Having failed to suppress the Israelites with harsh servitude, the new Pharaoh's next shrewd plan was more sinister. He ordered the massacre of the male Hebrew children. Ironically he chose professional life-bearers, the mid-wives, to be his instrument of death.²⁵ The lowly midwives are given names while the almighty Pharaoh is nameless, implying that the power and glory of the pharaoh are insignificant because they rest on foundations empty of moral content.²⁶ The king who can bend the entire nation to his whims cannot prevail upon the two lowly daughters of Israel. Further more, the entire Egyptian nation fails in their scheme, but the two Israelite women were successful:²⁷ "But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them but they let the boys live" (Exod 1:18).

This is the first recorded case of civil disobedience in defence of a moral cause.²⁸ These women defied the king's orders because they "feared God". In this refusal of the women to cooperate with oppression, the liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage had its beginnings.²⁹ The term "fear of God" is often cited in biblical texts in relation to a situation that involves moral or ethical behaviour (see Gen 20: 11; 42: 18; Lev 19: 14, 32; Job 1: 1, 8). The consciousness of the existence of a higher power that makes moral demands on human beings constitutes the ultimate restraint on evil and the supreme incentive for good. The midwives' choice was for the transcendent imperative of morality.³⁰ Totally outwitted by the lowly midwives and thwarted in his nefarious schemes, the Pharaoh enlists the entire apparatus of his state and orders: All new-born males are to be drowned in the River Nile (Exod 1: 22).

25 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 14.

26 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 25.

27 Fretheim *Exodus*, 31-32.

28 D. Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), 1-22.

29 Cheryl J. Exum, "You shall Let every Daughter Live: A Study of Ex 1: 8-2: 10," *Semeia* 28 (1983): 63-82.

30 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 25-26.

1.2.4. *The Birth of a Saviour: Moses (2:1-10)*

The narrative so far seems to take place on an equal level playing field. If there was an advantage, it had to be on the side of the Pharaoh. Nevertheless, the reader of the text is left in no doubt that the contest has been between Pharaoh and God, though in a very hidden and indirect way. The scale tilts in favour of God, signalled by the appearance on the scene of the towering personality of Moses, “preeminent in the entire cast of biblical characters. He is the redeemer of Israel, architect of its religion, consummate political leader, law giver, and archetypal prophet.”³¹

The narrative narrows down from all the “sons” of Israel (1: 7-14) to all male “sons” (1: 15-22) to one special “son”, (2: 1-10) who shall save the “firstborn sons”, Israel (Exod 4:22-23). Following the decree of the king, Moses is thrown into the Nile. It turns out that the daughter of the Pharaoh who discovered the child had pity on him. The sister and mother of the child quickly intervened to ensure the safe keeping of the child Moses. Moses’ good fortune augurs well for other Hebrew children too. In his birth Moses shares the fate of his people, but also signals that the end of their oppression is near at hand.

1.2.5. *Moses’ Action Foreshadows God’s (2:11-22)*

Three incidents in the early adult life of Moses made him come into contact with three groups of people: the Egyptians, his own people and the Midianites. “Each incident functions to provide a transition to what follows, to identify the adult Moses as an Israelite, to anticipate key events in the subsequent narratives, and to characterize Moses, especially as one who responds to injustice.”³² The first is his response to the injustice he saw when an Egyptian was ill-treating a Hebrew (Exod 2: 11-12). The second is his attempt to settle the wrong between two of his fellow Hebrews (2: 13-14). The third is his going out of his way to help the daughters of the Midianite priest Reuel (2: 15-22).

In these actions, Moses anticipates or foreshadows the actions of God. Moses sees Israel’s oppression, so does God (Exod 2: 25; 3: 7, 9; 4: 31; 5: 19). Moses “strikes” an Egyptian which is also God’s action

31 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 27.

32 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 41.

(12:12). Moses too “saves” or “delivers” which is also used for God’s salvation (14: 13, 30; 15: 2) and deliverance (3: 8; 6: 6; 12: 27) of Israel. Lastly, Moses confronts a wrong (2: 13) and so God through Moses will confront Pharaoh (v: 27). The common issue of Moses’ action foreshadowing that of God in each of these episodes is justice - three types of justice experienced by three types of victims and perpetrated by persons from three different peoples. Moses stands for justice. No wonder that God chooses Moses as his instrument of liberation of his people.

1.2.6. Israel’s Discovery of God in Oppression (Exod 3)

If up to this point, God had seemed hidden and involved at most indirectly, now he is so near and so real. “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites and God took notice of them” (Exod 2: 24-25). The covenant with the patriarchs has become activated again through God’s remembering.³³

The birth story of Moses and his experiences as a child had been so much intertwined with the life and experience of the people of Israel. The actions of his youth too augured well for his people. Now Moses becomes the human face of the God of their ancestors who had seemed hidden or distant so far. He tells Moses: “I am the God of your father/s, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. . . . I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, . . .” (Exod 3:6-8).

The personal encounter with the God of his ancestors itself must have been a liberating experience for Moses. Israelites often felt that God was absent from them or hiding his face from them. Now Moses realizes that God had not been absent but heard the groaning of his people and had come to deliver them. He also promises them a land, flowing with milk and honey. Moses is the herald of God’s good news

³³ Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 18.

and the instrument of liberation. At the start of God's summons, Moses' response was: "Here am I" (3:4). Now when God spells out the task he would assign to him, Moses' response became: "Who am I" (3:11). This is a typical human response. However, with the assurance of a God who will not only be present to Israelites but will be a faithful God for them, Moses agrees to be God's instrument to deliver Israel.³⁴

1.2.7. Deliverance by the Mighty Hand of God (Exod 7-11)

Instructing Moses to assemble the elders of the people in order to announce his plan of deliverance, God tells Moses: "I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go" (Exod 3: 19-20). These verses could be called the summary of the ten plagues because the plagues were the "coercive measures taken by God to break down Egyptian resistance to his demands."³⁵ The coercive nature is expressed in terms of "mighty hand" and "outstretched hand." These two expressions together refer to "the divine saving act of redemption from Egypt."³⁶

Two passages in the Torah suggest that the plagues are to be understood as much judgment on the Egyptian gods as on the Egyptians themselves: "For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals, on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord" (Exod 12:12). In Numbers 33:4, we are told that while the Egyptians were busy burying their firstborn children struck down by the Lord, the "Lord executed judgment even against their gods." *The Wisdom of Solomon* understood the plagues as a mockery of Egyptian paganism (12: 23-27). The entire story of the plagues is about a "contest between the will of the Pharaoh and the will of the God whom only the Israelites recognized. What is emphasized in the memory of the Israelites in regard to the plagues is that the hand of God did these

34 Fretheim, Exodus, 63.

35 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 68.

36 A. S. van der Woude, "Hzq, to be firm," *TLOT* I: 405-406.

things in order to free them and that only a closed heart could fail to understand.”³⁷

1.2.8. *Enactment of Deliverance in Liturgy* (Exod 12:1-28, 43-51; 13:1-16)

Every nation that has been under subjugation commemorates its day of liberation and freedom with a festival that becomes its signature of identification. The final capitulation of Pharaoh was at hand and so was the final liberation of the Israelites. They commemorated this event with a festival which will in the future become a permanent institutionalized symbol of their national identity. This was the feast of Passover.

It was the springtime of nature as it was the springtime of Israel as a free people and henceforth to be the beginning of the year.³⁸ “This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you” (Exod 12: 2). How meaningful it is to make the month of one’s independent existence as a people the very first of all the months of the year? In the four liturgical calendars listed in the Torah, each starts with the Passover.³⁹ What is unique about the Israelite New Year is that it is “grounded neither in nature’s renewal nor in mythology, such as an event in the life of a god, but in a historical event – the liberation of a people from oppression. Such a revolutionary phenomenon is without analogy in the ancient world.”⁴⁰ The fact that it coincides with the renewal of nature in spring adds to its meaningfulness and significance.

The Passover of Exodus is a combination and adaptation of the rituals of two ancient festivals (the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread). The importance and significance of the festival is the giving of a new meaning to the ancient festivals. The Passover was a “spring-time sacrifice of a young animal in order to secure fecundity and prosperity for the flock. The purpose of putting blood upon the stiles of the door was to drive away evil powers.”⁴¹ The

37 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 36

38 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 81

39 Cf. Exod 23: 14-17; 34: 18-23; Lev 23; Deut 16: 1-17.

40 Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 85.

41 Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (trans. J. McHugh: London: Longman & Todd, 5th Impression, 1980), 489.

feast of the Unleavened Bread marked the beginning of the barley harvest which was the first crop to be harvested. For the first seven days of the barley harvest, only bread with the new grain was eaten; it was eaten 'without leaven', i.e. without anything from the harvest of the previous year in it, symbolizing a new beginning⁴²

What is significant in the Passover ritual of Exodus is its connection with the saving events of the Hebrew people. All the traditions of the Pentateuch connect the feast of the Unleavened Bread (Exod 23: 15; 34: 18; Deut 10: 3), or the Passover (Deut 16: 1 and 6)), or both (Exod 12: 13-27 and 39) with Exodus. Exodus 12 is the text which connects them most closely in which the rites of both the feasts are incorporated into the story of Exodus and the theme of Exodus 12 is that both the rites were instituted to help in setting Israel free, and to commemorate its deliverance.⁴³ Whenever the Israelites commemorated the event, it was not just a remembrance of a past event, but it always made the redeeming reality present for them. It was as though the past and future generations of Israelites came together to be reconstituted as the people of God.⁴⁴

We can say that it is a classical example of what we would today call inculturation. The blood of the young animal sprinkled at the lintels of the door was the symbol of averting the disaster inflicted on the Egyptians. A new element was added to both rituals. In gratitude for the sparing their firstborn male, he became set apart for the Lord. (Exod 13: 11-15). The eating of the Unleavened Bread, originally a sign of the new grain without the leaven of the old became a symbol of their hurried departure from slavery to freedom.

1.2.9. Enactment in a Song of Victory (15:1-21)

The victory God achieved for Israel at the sea is the primary event of salvation. It is not an account of what happened at that night but represents what God did for Israel in the whole experience of the Exodus story as well as what God continues to do for them. The song also describes Israel's self-understanding as linked to her coming out

42 De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 490.

43 de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 492.

44 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 50.

of bondage and to her coming into the land through the mighty deeds of Yahweh. The song is essentially a praise which not only honours Yahweh but also gives witness to God throughout the earth.⁴⁵ The historical recitals like Deut 26: 5-11 and Josh 24: 3-13 are also outlined according to this basic pattern of Exodus.⁴⁶

Israel has read, reread and continues to read the story of Exodus as the foundational story of their fragile beginning as a nation and their struggle for liberation from slavery in Egypt and their final victory with the help of the mighty hand of God, Yahweh. This is celebrated every year in their national liturgy of the Passover.

How can tribals of Northeast India read this text as their own? This is the question we shall attempt to answer in the following pages?

2. Towards a Tribal Reading of Exodus 1-15

The statement of Biblical Commission's document (1993)⁴⁷, that "the interpretation of a text is always dependent on the mindset and concerns of its hearers" should be a guiding principle as we attempt a tribal reading of the Bible in general, and of the Exodus story in particular. What we are proposing here will not be exhaustive but rather indicative of how tribals could/should read the Bible. Following the principle of the Pontifical Biblical commission, we shall try to offer a tribal reading of the Exodus story in terms of the tribal situation/context which often points to their concerns. We shall conclude the section with a proposal for a possible hermeneutics of the tribal interpretation of the Bible.

2.1. *Liberation from Isolation and Marginalization*

If even today the people of the Northeast (NE), and the tribals of the region in particular, are said to be isolated from the mainstream India, it was more so about a century and a half ago. Only with the arrival of the British rule in the region as a result of the Treaty of Yandabo between the British East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma on 24 February 1826 at the end of the first Anglo-Burma war,⁴⁸ the hill tribes of the NE were exposed to the outside world. The

45 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 62-63.

46 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 162.

47 *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1994), 5.

48 F. S. Down, *The History of Christianity in India*, vol. V, Part 5: North East

British rule, the British law and the way the British dealt with the tribals changed the tribals and their world radically. Windows of possibilities beyond their wildest imagination were opened to them. This is the experience which can make tribals feel at home in the Exodus story of the Hebrews. Tribals were liberated from isolation, liberated from being nobody

However, they still have many miles to go in their journey through the wilderness before their final victory and entry into the Promised Land of equality, dignity and respect. They still live at the periphery of the consciousness of their own country's men and women: "The sad truth is that the Northeast is at the periphery of our consciousness. We are dimly aware that India includes several states peopled largely by men and women with high cheekbones but know little else about the region" and the response one gets is: "Don't they have tribal dances?" or "Weren't they head-hunters at one stage?"⁴⁹ The same idea is expressed by B. G. Verghese when he said: "Read Indian history as it is taught and you will scarcely know the Northeast exists"; it "remains in the periphery of the periphery"; "it remains somewhere there."⁵⁰

Tribals also are still racially discriminated against even after sixty years of guarantee of equality by the Constitution of the country. The distinctiveness of the Dravidian south has been recognized, but the peculiarities of the Mongoloid cultures of the Northeast, which have an equally venerable history, have still to be acknowledged and accepted as fully Indian.⁵¹ The dominant Aryan bent of national thinking has accommodated the Dravidian reality but has yet to appreciate the Mongoloid features of the Indian ethos.⁵² The Prime Minister, in his meeting with the students' delegation from the Northeast, stated: "N-E people have equal claim on Delhi."⁵³ The fact, that students of the

India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Bangalore: CHAI, 1992), 6.

49 Vir Sanghvi, "Can the twain meet," *Sunday* (7-13 April, 1996): 8.

50 B. G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1996), 280.

51 J. Parrat, *Wounded Land: Politics and History in Modern Manipur* (New Delhi: Mittal Publicationsm 2005), 1-2.

52 Verghese, *India's Northeas*, 281.

53 *The Shillong Times* (December 11, 2009): 1.

Northeast had to appeal to the highest executive power of the land to air their grievances, speaks volumes on their discrimination.

Though every conceivable effort is made to make sure that the Northeast remains within the Indian territory, no proportionate effort is visible regarding the acceptance of the people of the Northeast as full-fledged Indians. Psychological and emotional non-acceptance can often be more hurting than physical oppression. That is why the "proud but small nationalities" of the Northeast are rising in insurgency one after another.⁵⁴ The names of the insurgency groups containing terms like "liberation", "national" or the particular name of an ethnic group are indicative of their aspirations and hopes.⁵⁵ Their liberation from isolation and their new found windows of opportunities are still fragile and threatened by powerful forces. They need a leader like Moses to lead them to total freedom.

2.2. *New Identity as Christians: Most Liberating*

The Exodus was for the Hebrew people the event through which they became the Yahweh's "treasured possession out of all the peoples, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exod 19: 5-6). This experience was identity enhancing and as liberating as the liberation from slavery.

Tribal Christians of the Northeast can also read their entry into the Christianity in terms of their acquiring a new identity, becoming the people of God. Hitherto unknown, unnoticed, the tribals were always looked down upon by their immediate Hindu neighbours "as barbarians and, given the nature of the Hindu society, they would have been assimilated at the very lowest social levels. This was all too obvious to the tribals from the way in which they were treated when they visited the plain markets."⁵⁶ Christian missionaries embraced them as members of the Christian family with open arms making them join the great Christian family worldwide. It was one of the most profound liberating

54 anjay Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994), xviii.

55 Peter Haokip, "The Tribal people of the Northeast: A Liberating Quest for Identity, Equality and Respect," *JPJRS* 2/2 (1999): 63.

56 F. S. Downs, *Essays on Christianity in North-East India* (ed.. M. S. Sangma and D. Syiemlieh; New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1994), 179.

experiences of the tribals. Many people, including scholars, think that tribals of the NE must have been lured into or forced to convert to Christianity, but the truth is that their being accepted by the missionaries as equal human beings was more powerful than any allurements or force. Hence, it would have been most irrational and illogical if they were not to accept Christianity wholeheartedly.

2.2.1. *Written Literature: Added Vehicle of Identity*

This awareness of a new identity was further boosted by the introduction of education and written literature among the tribals. A very conservative estimate would be that Christian missionaries were responsible for the development of a written form of at least fifty different languages of the tribals of Northeast India. Most tribals have myths of the loss of literature which was likened, in function, to the "Garden of Eden/Fall mythology of the Judaeo-Christian tradition" ... and the "recovery of literacy was anticipated as a form of tribal redemption." Not just any written literature, but the Bible was the first written literature given to the tribals. The Bible, in fact, became the vehicle of "reinforcing the cultural identity of the people"⁵⁷ Elsewhere I have summarized the aspiration of the tribals of Northeast India as "A Liberating Quest for Identity, Equality and Respect."⁵⁸ Christianity gave them a taste of the fulfilment of their aspirations.

2.2.2. *A Reading in Quest of the Tribe's Moses*

In the predominantly theocratic society of the Hebrews, it is significant that God relies on the limitations of human leadership to lead his people to freedom. This is the core message of the struggle for the freedom of the Hebrew people. The mission of Moses has become the prototype of many other calls that will follow in the history of salvation.⁵⁹ The mission of Moses is also the paradigm of God's dealings with human beings.

Tribal reading of the Exodus should lead to a search or discovery of the community's Moses. Reading the Exodus story in order to identify the tribe's Moses, we need to pay attention to the qualities of leadership

57 Downs, *Essays on Christianity*, 192.

58 Haokip, "The Tribal People," 63-72.

59 Binz, *The God of Freedom*, 20.

embedded in the narrative. First of all, Moses shares the fate of his people (Exod 2:1-10). As the birth of his people as a nation is threatened so is his birth. Moses is a leader who embodies Israel in his life experience and at the same time foreshadows God's actions. In many ways, Moses both relives the fate of his people and anticipates their future. He becomes one of them by virtue of his own experience.⁶⁰

Though initially he was reluctant to take up responsibility of liberating Israel, once he took it up, Moses put his heart and soul into his task. He never forgot that he was purely an instrument of God. He was a real mediator between his people and God. He always kept the communication between his God and himself. In no instance did he ever show that he was a leader on his own right.

Tribals of the Northeast are acutely in need of a leader like Moses. One of the saddest facts about them is that communities which knew no corruption are now plagued by the menace of corruption. It has "become a way of life."⁶¹ According to Patricia Mukhim, one of the keen observers of the Northeast, "it is unbelievable that scams involving thousands of crores remain buried under the carpet in the Northeast."⁶² Tribal leaders reading the story of Moses should take him as a model, and tribal people must submit to their leaders as the Israelites did to Moses, as they would do to God himself. Finally, the story of Moses tells us that God wants to achieve our liberation through human instrumentality.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the tribal reading offered is indicative rather than exhaustive. But the three readings chosen are foundational to what tribals are today. Their liberation from isolation and marginalization has been the vital first opening for tribals to make a mark for themselves in the world. Their conversion to

60 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 42.

61 Peter Haokip, "Major Challenges Faced by the Tribals of Northeast India," in *Tribes of North-East India: Issues and Challenges* (ed. Berichi K. Medhi, R. P. Athparia, K. Jose; New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 2009), 82-90.

62 Patricia Mukhim, "Case of syndicated corruption in Northeast," *The Shillong Times* (May 16, 1997), 4

Christianity has been one of the most identity enhancing experiences which makes the tribals of today stand tall among their fellow human beings. Having a good leadership among them is one of their greatest concerns if they are to reap the fruits of their liberation from isolation and their acquired identity. Tribals are increasingly abandoning their traditional values. A good possible reading of the Exodus would be a new exodus of going home to their cultural roots as Israelites speak of the second Exodus of going home from exile in Second Isaiah.

3. Tribal Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics of Dialogue

For most tribals of Northeast India, interpretation of the Bible was not a big issue. The Bible was the first written text of their language in their hands. They could read and understand most of it quite easily because the simple cultural background of the Bible is something quite familiar to the tribal world. Since they could understand the cultural medium, they felt that they also understood the message. Whether it was always a correct or proper understanding or not is another matter. However, as more and more tribal scholars are engaged in the study of the Bible, and as enlightened reading of the Bible increases, there is a need to develop a tribal hermeneutics for biblical interpretation.

3.1. *Hermeneutics of Dialogue*

To my knowledge, there is hardly any literature on specifically tribal hermeneutics. The only one I have come across is the one proposed by Thanzauva and R. L. Hnuni, two Mizo tribal scholars, for whom tribal hermeneutics is “a sister hermeneutics of the *dalit* hermeneutics and part of liberation hermeneutics, because the tribal people read the Bible in the context of an identity crisis – alienation from their land and culture, exploitation and economic dependency.”⁶³ Without denying the validity of this proposal, I would rather suggest a little broader based model of hermeneutics along the lines proposed by the Chinese scholar, Kwok-Puilan.

63 Thanzauva and R. L. Hnuni, “Ethnicity, Identity and Hermeneutics: An Indian Tribal Perspective,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 351-57.

Kwok-Puilan, in her book, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World*,⁶⁴ proposes a dialogical model of biblical interpretation for Asia. This model should take into account: “not only the written text but also oral discussion of the text in different social dialects, shifting the emphasis from one scripture (the Bible) to many scriptures, It also shifts from a single axis framework of analysis to multi-axial interpretation, and issues of race, gender, culture, history, and construction of meanings by marginalized people.”⁶⁵

Dialogue basically means “talking with each other. Such talking implies mutuality, active listening, and openness to what one’s partner has to say. Asian Christians are heirs of both the biblical story and our own story as Asian people, and we are concerned to bring the two into dialogue with one another.” Her proposal is based on her observation of what Asian theologians have done in the field of theology.⁶⁶ The Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama, tried to do in his book: *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai* pointing out the need to do theology in the context of a dialogue between Asian spirituality and biblical spirituality.⁶⁷ Similarly, “biblical interpretation in Asia must create a two-way traffic between our tradition and that of the Bible.”⁶⁸

3.2. *Dialogue will Lead to the Discovery of Harmony/Resonance*

If the Bible is steeped in tribal values and ethos and if the Gospel of Jesus is a return to the tribal ethos, would it not be more appropriate to speak of a hermeneutics of harmony or resonance? The point of arrival is indeed the discovery of harmony or resonance. However, we need a process to discover this harmony, and that process should follow the dialogical model. The community that reads the narratives or stories of the Bible in dialogue with their own myths and stories will discover that there is a harmony and resonance between the stories of the Bible and those of their own. A testimony of this is given by George Rosendale, an Australian Aborigines Lutheran Pastor:

64 Kwok-Puilan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 36.

65 Puilan, *Discovering the Bible*, 36. 66 Puilan, *Discovering the Bible*, 12.

67 Cf. Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: A Critique of Idols* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984) 7-8.

68 Puilan, *Discovering the Bible*, 12.

I have been able to understand and communicate Western Christianity [to other Aborigines] because I have been trained in /European culture. But it was very painful for me when I noticed that my people were straining desperately as they attempted to understand and grasp the deep meaning of the gospel. Only when I began to learn their stories and customs and used them as pictures to see and understand the gospel did I notice their faces light up. To hear comments such as: "Ah! It's like our story!" made me very happy to share the gospel with my people."⁶⁹

In this interface between the tribal culture and the Word of God as narrative in the Exodus story, a transformation of the Word of God as well as the community takes place: "The indigenous community that reads the Bible begins to transform the biblical text, but at the same time the biblical text begins to transform the indigenous community. The community reads the text, and the text reads the community."⁷⁰

This is dialogue.

This is exactly how the Word of God should first find a home in the hearts of the people by being conveyed to them through the medium of their own culture, traditions and imagery. The Word of God will then be the community's very own. Only when things are one's own, can one really make use of them as a means of transformation. To be able to carry out such a dialogue between the culture and traditions of the tribals with those of the Bible, a biblical scholar needs to be versatile in both cultures.

Conclusion

Tribal reading of the Bible is by no means the reading of people who are called by derogatory names, but it is a reading rooted in the genuine values of a community. These values are also the values of the Bible which are rooted in the divine reality itself. All are invited, including the tribals themselves, to read the Bible in the light of these

69 Lynne Hume, "The Rainbow Serpent, the Cross, and the Fax Machine: Australian Aboriginal Response to the Bible, in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, 363.

70 Richard Pablo, "Biblical Interpretation from the Perspective of Indigenous Cultures of Latin America (Mayas, Kunas, and Quechuas)," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, 310.

values. In fact, as already pointed out, this way of reading the Bible is an alternative way rooted in the values of “anti-creed and anti-greed.”⁷¹

The present-day world is divided into the first, the second, and the third worlds. The criterion of this division is the economics of the haves and those who have less. What is ‘flattening,’ making all equal is the greed of the haves to have more and their powerful creed promoted equally powerfully by the modern media held captive by them and justifying their creed. A tribal reading of the Bible based on the values of anti-greed and anti-creed will bring a refreshing newness to the world environmentally endangered by greed.

Such a reading of the Bible by tribals is easier for them because they are more at home in the cultural milieu of the Bible which is filled with tribal values and ethos. They are in a better position to discern these values and other genuinely human values like “extraordinary values of solidarity with nature, egalitarianism, a non-competitive collaboration with one another, and a filial (not mercantile) relationship with the land.”

Tribal communities cannot compete with the technological advances of other communities, but no one else can show the way to promote tribal values than themselves. If technological advances geared by greed are bringing the world to the brink of disaster, tribal values of anti-greed, closeness to nature, egalitarianism and non-competitive collaboration with one another is a way forward to save the world both ecologically and spiritually. The world would then not look down on the tribals derogatorily, but will realize that it is precisely what is to be created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), bringing down with it “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1).

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71 George M. Soares-Prabhu, “Antigreed and Anticreed: Mark 10: 17-27 and 10: 35-45 in the Light of Tribal Values,” in *Biblical Themes for a Contextual Theology Today: Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, vol. I* (ed. Isaac Padijarekuttu; Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1999), 241-259.

YOU ARE THE MAN

Towards an Indian Reading of 2 Samuel 12

Paul Kalluveettil

Paul Kalluveettil CMI presents an Indian reading of the parable of Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:1-12). It begins with an overview of the important interpretations of the text followed by a careful reading of the text focusing on the literary devices and exegetical annotations. He then explores the world of implied meanings of the parable and draws out some of its implications for the Church in India. The poor man in the parable seems to point to the dawn of the new creation and have a prophetic message for the people in India.

Introduction

This study of the parable of Nathan tries to give it a contextual interpretation. First we approach it from the literary perspective. The parable has not given names to the characters. There is a rich man, a poor man and a traveller. Even the place where the incident occurred remains unnamed. Also the little ewe lamb, which occupies a central place in the story, does not have a proper name. All these factors, one may say, free the Word of God from the fetters of time and space. It indicates that the story can be told and retold, read and re-read, interpreted and re-interpreted according to the demands of existential situations. Thus the text is opened to different types of hermeneutical applications. One can discover meanings beyond the literal meaning. It serves as a rich reservoir of implied significance. This study attempts to read the parable in the Indian context.

1. The Past Studies

Before making a personal reading of the text I would like to mention certain important studies. According to John Dominic Crossan the story consists of a five-fold typology: myth establishes the world, apologue defends the world, action investigates the world, satire attacks the world, and parable subverts the world¹. I do not want to make a critical evaluation of the author's theory, since it does not directly concern us. Wolfgang Roth has made a structural study of Nathan's parable². The author makes a contrast between David, the royal judge, and David, the rich oppressor. He thus concludes the study: "Nathan's stark response to David, 'You are the man,' remains the most jagged edge within the structural interplay of the constituents of 2 Samuel 10-12." Uriel Simon finds in the text an example of a juridical parable³. I will be making use of some of the insights of this scholarly article. George W. Coates makes a hermeneutical reading of the parable⁴. The study of H. Eberhard Von Waldow on "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel" may help us to read the parable in the light of the biblical laws⁵.

2. Literary Devices

The rich man is introduced as *ashir*, a term often sharply used in the Old Testament in negative sense, in order to make a contrast with the poor. He is said to have had a very large number of sheep and cattle. The phrase conveys the sense of unusual abundance and points to exploitation and oppression. The way this fellow is mentioned makes it clear that the narrator is not at all interested in him. By saying that he had everything, the story-teller dismisses him. It was the end of the

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- 1 John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval, Towards a Theology of Story*, Niles: Argus, 1975, pp. 58-62
 - 2 Wolfgang Roth, "You are the Man! Structural Interaction in 2 Samuel 10-12"; *Semeia* 8 (1977) 1-13
 - 3 Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Eve Lamb, An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Biblica* 48 (1967) 207-242
 - 4 George W. Coates, "2 Samuel 12:1-7a," *Interpretation* 40 (1986), 170-175.
 - 5 H.Eberhard von Waldow, "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32 (1970) 182-204.

description. We get a feeling that this man of 'havingness' and 'beingness', one who was living in his own world of cynicism, selfishness, destruction, and greed (as the story tells later) needs to be despised, and such a lifestyle should be delegitimized and rejected.

The antonym of *ashir* is *rash*. This is how the poor man is introduced. In contrast to the picture of one who had everything, this wretched fellow is said to have *en kol*, an expression to indicate the state of nothingness. He was practically a no-body, a non-having and non-being creature – in Hebrew a *qaton* (a little one, in Sanskrit *asatta*) in contrast to the Hebrew *gadol* (a great one). Still the narrator wants us to fix our attention on him.

This poor man had one little female lamb, which was his whole property, the only means of his livelihood. The narrator takes time to sketch the life of the poor man clearly and vividly. This one little ewe lamb was like a most beloved daughter. As a loving father or mother he nurtured it; he gave it food and drink from his own cup. It was a member of his family. This precious lamb lay in the man's bosom, treasured and safe. While the very large number of sheep and cattle did not enjoy family membership of the rich man, the little ewe lamb grew up with the poor man and his children. The marginalized man of that time opens up a new world and a new vision, in which animals can become members of the family. It unfolds before us the world of paradise. The narrator gives an impression that this poor man lived a life of happiness and peace in the company of his children, which included also the female lamb.

The story suddenly comes to a tragic end by an unexpected visit of a wayfarer, about whom the unusual term *helek* (literally 'walker') is used. It seems to have an emotive association with 2 Sam 11:2, where the same root is used concerning David, whom the rich man in the parable represents: "and (David) was walking (*yithalek*) upon the roof of his house." It was this *hlk* which prompted passion, sin and murder in the one who had everything in abundance. The coming of the *hlk* made the rich man in the parable to sin against the social law by stealing the only property on which the livelihood of the poor man depended. Now the greatest rich man in the country stole the only wife from her

husband, although Yahweh had given "your master's wives into your arms" (2 Sam 12:8). Adultery amounted to an act of stealing.

The statement that "it (the little ewe lamb) did *eat* of his morsel and *drank* from his cup and *lay* in his bosom" seems to remind us of the words of Uriah in 2 Sam 11:11: "Shall I then go to my house in order to *eat* and *drink* and to *lie* with my wife?" The appearance of the three same words in the parable is purposeful. Nathan depicts the relationship between the poor man and his ewe in emotionally charged terms in order to arouse the compassion of David as well as the readers.

The rich man spared (*hml*) from taking one of his flock... he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man. The term *lqh* is repeated twice in v.4. The verb *lqh* has the following extensions of meaning: take, seize, grab, take for oneself, take away, appropriate for one self.⁶ The rich man did not take his own flock, but took away the poor man's only property. His act amounted to illegal seizing by force, as in I Sa.2:16. The prophet Samuel in his warning against kingship has repeatedly used *lkh* (6 times), to indicate the action of a king: he will take the people's sons; he will take their daughters; he will take their fields and vineyards and olive yards; he will take the tenth of their harvest; he will take their menservants and maidservants and donkeys; he will take the tenth of their sheep (1 Sam 8:11-19). In the rich man's action in the parable, the face of David is reflected, who took Bathsheba, the dearest treasure of Uriah (2 Sam 11:4), one of the aliens, who were then considered as nobodies. The rich man 'raped' the daughter-like treasure of the poor man, as David raped the wife of Uriah. Both the king and the rich man took what was not theirs and treated it as if it were their own. The verb *hml* is used both in v.4 and v.6 in different senses. The rich man spared his flock (v.4) and did not have pity for the little lamb and its owner. Literally he was 'sorry' to have to give up his own property, and was not 'sorry' to take the property of the poor man. The repetition of this keyword in a different sense serves as an efficient literary device. In David's enraged reaction for the lack of pity for the poor man, he forgets his own lack of pity for Uriah. He

6 H. Seebass, "*lqh*" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. VIII, ed G. Johannes Botterweck ... Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1997, pp. 16-21.

purposefully sent that foreigner to death, and assumed a mantle of indifference at the news of his downfall. The king did not even try to assume an apparent attitude of pity. It showed his callousness towards human life. Now at the behavior of the rich man in the parable his "anger was greatly kindled" (v.6). Here the murderer acts as a righteous judge in the case of others!

One can see in condemning the rich man to death ("As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die," v. 5) his over-inflated ego. David finds fault with the lack of pity of the rich man for the marginalized. The word pity plays an important role in the salvation history. The Egyptian princess had *hml* on the Hebrew slave child (Ex.2:6). The Lord had pity on his people and on his dwelling place (2 Chr. 36:15). Yahweh is the one who has *hml* for his holy name which the people of covenant profaned (Ez. 36:21). He was zealous for his land and took pity on his people (Joel 2:18). It was only because of this divine pity that Yahweh elected David and made Israel to survive the exile at Babylon. Now his chosen one behaves without pity for the foreigner, and then accuses the rich man of his lack of pity for the poor man!

3. Exegetical Annotations

Certain terms which appear in the text need further clarification. The villain of the parable is called *ashir*, a designation which has very often negative connotation in the Old Testament.⁷ Many texts speak of the inadequacy of wealth and the injustice connected with it: Qoh 5:12; Prov. 18:23; 22:16; 28:6,11. The prophets present the rich in darker tones: Jer 9:22; Mic 6:12. The wealthy scoundrel becomes a kind of stock figure. Yahweh will condemn those who amass wealth unjustly, Jer 17:11. In the biblical vision wealth is to be concerned with community in the context of changing economic and social circumstances.⁸ Thus wealth cannot be an individual concern; it is equally a concern of the community.

7 M. Sacbo, "*ashir*" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. XI, 2001, pp. 417-422.

8 See the article of H. Eberhard von Waldow, cited in N. 5.

The victim is designated *rash*⁹, which is used in sharp contrast with the rich. These persons belong to low social status and lead a miserable life. Yahweh has a special concern for these impoverished people (e.g. Dt. 15:4ff). Very often poverty and disgrace appear as synonymous (prov. 13:18).

En-kol: the word *kol* refers to totality¹⁰, and means “everything, the whole.” It points to the divine attribute. Yahweh formed everything; his Kingdom encompasses everything. “All the earth” is to praise him (Ps. 96:1) and trembles before him (Ps 96:9). Now the rich man in the parable seems to be presented as taking the role of God. This implicitly tends to indicate the eventual punishment of Yahweh (Is. 2:12ff). While the rich man is a *kol* person the poor one is presented as *en-kol* – the negation of *kol*.¹¹ Thus he is practically a no-body, in Indian terminology *agathi* (one who has no protection, refuge and salvation). We may call him a non-having and non-being creature.

The Semitic root *skb* in Akkadian language means lie down to rest. It may refer to having sexual intercourse or sleep.¹² As a theological term it is associated with rest as a mode of existence. The Hebrew *heq* means loins¹³. Sometimes it refers to sexual relationship. The word is also used to describe an intimate but nonsexual relationship especially between mother and child (I Kg. 3:20; 17:19; Lam 2:12). When Naomi lays the child of her daughter-in-law in her *heq* (Ruth 4:16ff), we may be dealing with an adoption ceremony. In our parable the poor man's lamb lays (*tishkab*) is his *heq* and was like a daughter to him. This is indeed a parental image, which appears again in Num 11:12, where

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- 9 M. Sacbo, “*rws*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. XII, 2004, pp.422-426.
- 10 H. Ringgren, “*kol*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. VIII, 1995, pp.135-141.
- 11 Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon* Vol. I, E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1967, pp. 40-41.
- 12 W. Beuken, “*shakab*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. XIV, 2004, pp.659-671.
- 13 G. Andre “*heq*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. IV, 1980, pp. 356-358.

Moses is asked to carry the people in his *heq*, as a nurse carries a sucking child. In Is. 40:11 (cf. Is. 40:20; 43:7) Yahweh the shepherd is said to carry in his *heq*, in the bulge of his garment at his chest, the little ones. These expressions convey the notion of solicitude.

4. Indignation and Indictment

The king sharply reacted to the story: "David's anger was greatly kindled (*wayyihar ap*) against the man." *Harah* has the basic meaning burn. With *ap* it signifies "(someone's) nose/anger burned hot"¹⁴. It is an intense expression to signify extreme rage and violent boiling, which makes one lose self-control, as was the case of the king over an injustice. His reaction is to be contrasted with his cool and cruel demeanour at the death of Uriah.

"As Yahweh lives/ by the life of Yahweh, the son of death is the man who has done this." The expression *hay YHWH* is an oath formula.¹⁵ The Lord is invoked to become the witness to the oath and to keep watch over it. This is indeed a very forceful and fearsome act of swearing. The rich man is called the son of death, one who is destined to die at any cost. David the judge condemns the rich man to pay the owner back fourfold.¹⁶

"You are the man!" Here we find a daring change of rhetoric. Leaving aside the language of artistic finesse, Nathan boldly and directly confronts the king with the succinct statement: *atta haish*. In this declaration the prophet in Nathan comes *to the* forefront. It was a high-risk affair to indict a 'His Highness' who was surrounded by yes-men. The court-prophet becomes Yahweh's spokesman, being liberated from the fetters of loyalty and friendship. As David swore by the life of Yahweh, now the prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh, with the divine authority. The prophet's 'I' became the divine 'I'. "Thus says the Lord God of Israel." First Yahweh's envoy enumerated the blessings which the Lord had showered upon David (vv.7-8). Then he hurls the

14 D.N. Freedman, J.R. Lundbom, "harah" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. V, 1986, pp. 171-176.

15 H. Ringgren "haya" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. IV, 1980, pp. 324-344.

16 Uriel Simon cites examples from the Bedouin traditions, see No. 3.

question at David: "Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight?" The word *madua* is a strong adverb, which is used to question the reason for one's action. Thus Isaac demands of Abimelech that he reveal the purpose of his coming, since the king of Gerar had till then considered him an enemy and sent him away (Gen. 26:27). Now Yahweh wants to get an answer from David why he had committed evil in his sight, although the Lord had favorably dealt with him. The Hebrew verb *baza* means to treat wickedly.¹⁷ It indicates contempt and repudiation. The king's adultery was the result of despising "the word of Yahweh", and therefore God himself. The three commandments David violated are the prohibitions on killing, adultery, and coveting. Thus the king violated crucial claims of the Torah. Thereby he also violated the gifts of Yahweh and the deep commitment the Lord has made to him. While the compassionate God 'gave' (v. 8, 3 times), David 'took' another's wife, 'took' the life of Uriah (v.9). The monarch imagined himself immune from the demanding governance of Yahweh; he has been seduced by the royal view that he has absolute power to do whatever he likes. According to Prov. 14:2, he who despises the Lord and is devious in his ways, will die (Prov 19:16).

The prophetic oracle in vv. 8-12 illustrates that even a person after Yahweh's own heart (1Sam 13:14), with whom the Lord had made an eternal covenant, is not immune to the sting of divine sanctions. Through Nathan Yahweh makes it clear that the enduring house of David will become a place of enduring strife.

5. A World of Implied Meanings

The text opens to us a world of inner meanings. It "takes the reader to a depth meaning which is experienceable but not expressible".¹⁸ I would like to focus attention on some of them.

17 M. Gçrg, "baza" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol II, 1975, pp. 60-65.

18 See F.X. Dsa, "Dhvani as a Method of Interpretation," *Bible Bhashyam*, 5/4, Dec. 1979, pp. 276-294.

Behind the parable there stands the oppressive structures of the society, in which the rich and the powerful can do any injustice, exploit the marginalized people. The case of David reveals that an administrator of justice can become a rich oppressor, whom nobody can question or punish. It is ironical that David the royal judge condemns David the rich oppressor. Thereby the enraged king pronounces the verdict on himself.

The rich man of the parable represents a person who lives in his world of 'havingness' and 'beingness'. He is satisfied with his wealth and comforts, and is not at all interested in or concerned with the fate of his fellow beings. This brings to our mind the parable of Lazarus (Lk 17:19-31). But the rich man of Nathan's parable fares worse than that of the New Testament story, where the rich man did not do any harm to the beggar. He only allowed his dogs to come and lick the sores of the wretched Lazarus. On the contrary the rich man of 2 Sam 12, whom we can imagine as being dressed in purple and fine linen and living in luxury everyday (Lk 17:19), was also a shrewd exploiter. Without any prick of conscience he, in cold blood, took the only possession, the most precious possession, of the poor man.

Behind the figure of the poor man there emerges a person of non-having and non-being, an *agathi*, who has to depend upon God for his survival. Still he seems to lead a happy family life. Even animals become a part of his family. In him we find the symbol of those who love animals and consider them members of the family. Here we have the portrait of an authentic human being who willingly shares his food and drink with others, even with God's creatures. The vision of a cosmic family is unveiled here. It anticipates the new creation, and a new paradise, the dawn of the Messianic era, as described in Is. 11:1-9. Some of its prophetic articulations are worth citing. "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

6. The Contextual Application of the Text

Let us try to draw out some of the contextual implications of the text, especially for the Indian society, in which the majority of people are condemned to lead a life of 'have-nots'. Very often they undergo systematic exploitation and blatant injustice, not only in political and cultural but also in religious spheres. A few enjoy the wealth which they accumulate at the expense of the unfortunate majority. The natural resources are in the hands of such persons. Political parties subtly play on the religious passions of the uneducated folk for their egoistic purposes. Because of which there flare up communalism, regionalism, fundamentalism, fanaticism, corruption and discrimination. The religious leaders generally take the side of the governing authorities and use religion as the opium of the people.¹⁹ Unfortunately we do not find any prophets sent by the Lord, like Nathan, to the oppressors (2 Sam. 12:1). May these reflections inspire the readers to go and confront and condemn the perpetrators of the economics of affluence, politics of oppression and exploitation, and a static and triumphal religion.

Let me focus my attention on certain concrete realities. The Church in India, especially in Kerala, where Christianity enjoys power and influence, is called by Jesus to become the voice of the marginalized of society. Very often, like David, the Church authorities raise their voice against violation of minority rights and corrupt practices of the political leaders. But at the same time they themselves violate in a subtle way social justice and exploit the people of the low strata. Take for instance the corruption rampant in Church institutions. Naturally one will think of the extraction of capitation and donation fees. Another counter-witnessing operation is the preoccupation to raise up huge museum-like Churches. Even the poor people are compelled to contribute to such enterprises. Like David they 'take,' rather than 'give'. Thus the religious authorities tarnish the image of the God of the Bible, who "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45). The greatest act of his benevolence was to give his only begotten Son, so that humans have eternal life (Jn 3:16). The sermons and threats of the so-called

19 For the details see Paul Kalluveetil, *The World Becomes the 'Word'*, Marymatha publications: Thrissur, 2009, pp. 29-31.

ministers of the Word of God have become a matter of hypocrisy and scandal even in the eyes of devout Christians. In the community of the poor Nazarene the outsiders find the face of those who revel in riches and follow the ideology of autocracy. The voice of the Lord in Is. 6:8 resounds at this non-divine and inhuman situation: "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us" to boldly shout: "You are the man!"²⁰

The figure of the poor man conveys a radical message for the Indian folk. This non-having and non-being person stands out as the model for Jesus' disciples about whom the Master will proclaim: "Blessed are you who are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God" (Lk 6:1). He participated in divine generosity by making the little ewe lamb grow up with him and his children, allowing it to eat of his own food and drink of his own cup, and considering it as a little daughter who can sleep in his arms. It seems that this *agathi* enjoyed a cosmic vision, and loved animals with a maternal heart. Thus he seems to point to the dawn of the new creation, the prospect for a new life which comes from divine compassion.

Conclusion

"You are the man!" – This solemn word of accusation and condemnation is destined to be an everlasting word in the Indian society. The modern prophets of India should be ready to risk themselves without reservation, protection or guarantee, to challenge and reject the structural evils of our country. This word has to assume the potentiality of rain and snow which come down from heaven (Is. 55:10) in order to radically change the existing evil systems and practices. This prophetic word should remain a word which evokes and provokes the true disciples of Christ whom the Roman authority thus addressed: "This is the man!" (Jn 19:5).

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King Ahab and Jezebel: Patrons of the Special Economic Zone An Intertextual Reading of 1 Kings 21

Peter Ignatius

Peter Ignatius SJ begins his article by describing some of the salient features and contradictions of the contemporary Indian society. He then clarifies the methodology of intertextual reading. The main characters of the story of 1 Kings 21 – King Ahab, Queen Jezebel and Naboth – are compared with the patrons of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and the poor landowners in India. The author draws a parallel between the way Queen Jezebel had usurped the land of Naboth and the way the patrons of SEZ are usurping the land of the poor in India. In the biblical story, the Lord sent Elijah to condemn the King and Queen, but the poor in India are still waiting for the arrival of their redeemer.

Introduction

Gone are the days when it was said that the message of the Bible is neutral, irrespective of one's place, time, and culture. We have also moved ahead from the days of pure historical criticism of the text to making use of the fruits of the aforementioned method to probe further into uncharted new areas.¹

1 Fr. George Soares prabhu has already pointed out sharply the lacunae of the historical critical method and argued passionately to move beyond the boundaries of this method. Soares-Prabhu, George M. "Towards an Indian Interpretation of the Bible." in *Collected Writings of George M. Soares-Prabhu, S.J.* Vol. I: *Biblical Themes for A Contextual Theology Today*. (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, 1999), 207-222.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* is an invitation to read the biblical text from an Indian perspective. This paper would define the Indian context by its contradictions and existential systems that are present in it. There are four blaring contradictions - ours is a rich country both in the natural and human resources and yet most of the people are poor; we are proud of our ancient religio-cultural traditions and yet there is discriminatory caste system and uninterrupted communal violence; while woman is glorified as deity, as one who is closer to life, and yet male domination openly subjugates and turns her life into wretchedness; there is respect for nature, and yet there exists the situation of its ruthless exploitation. There are also four existential systems. There is an unjust socio-political system that produce 15% of powerful elite; our cultural system is in crisis emanating from the tensions between tradition and modernity (rather post-modernity) paving the way for a hybrid mixture resulting in empty symbolisms; the third existential reality is the reemergence of religious consciousness that is being exploited by the fundamentalists of all religions; finally, there is a ground swell of grass-root movements enabling and empowering the ordinary and simple people.

Thus when Indians read the Bible, they need to be conscious of these multi-faceted context. This paper proposes an intertextual reading of the Bible along with the Indian context as text. The central idea of intertextual criticism is a perspective that says a work can best be understood by seeing it in the context of the linguistic, literary conventions as well as the larger realistic situation of our time. It will be an impossible task to consider all the contexts within the limitation of a single paper. Therefore, the paper will focus on the existing contradiction in the distribution of land resulting in the rise of the rich-and-the-poor disparity.²

What is intertextual reading? It was first systematically developed by Julia Kristeva in 1967. However, the concept of intertextuality has

2 For a similar reading of the text refer to Kwalotswe, Obed. 2006. "The Grabbing of Naboth's Vineyard: The Economic Implications of The 1958 Land Policy in Botswana and Its Challenges to The Mission of The Church in Botswana and Southern Africa." *Scriptura*, no. 92: 225-239. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLA Serials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 21, 2009).

been employed vigorously within poststructuralist circles by Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, Michel Riffaterre, and Paul de Man. According to them, “[A]s texts are read by individual readers and reading communities who enter into conversation with them, they are rewoven or rewritten out of the threads of innumerable other texts. From this perspective, texts acquire new meanings to the extent that they are situated in relation to other texts in a web of mutual interference and illumination.”³

Intertextuality is not a matter of one author exerting influence on the other or one literary source on another literary work. According to Kristeva intertextuality has two dimensions: the inner play, namely “‘the web of relations that produce the structure of the text (or the subject),’ and the outer play, ‘the web of relations linking the text (subject) with other discourses.’”⁴

Deriving the insights from the above mentioned scholars this paper intends to apply the theory to two live texts. This paper further proposes to treat the intertextual reading from the perspective of the major characters (Ahab, Jezebel and Naboth) of the biblical text. Thus, the faceless SEZ will have clear flesh and blood characters. One is the text from the Bible, the story of Naboth (1 Kgs 21) where one reads how Naboth’s land was usurped by the ruling king and queen. The second text is taken from the live situation in India where through the creation of the Special Economic Zones the rich and the powerful continue to usurp the lands of the poor and the marginalized.

1. Text One – 1 Kings 21

Naboth owned a vineyard, next to the palace of King Ahab. The king, seeing the nearness of the land to his palace, wanted to acquire it as his vegetable garden. However, when the king expressed his desire to purchase the land, Naboth firmly refused to oblige him on the ground that the land was his ancestral inheritance. The queen, seeing her husband angry and sulking, questioned his ability to rule his country

3 Aichele, George, and Gary A. Philips. “Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis.” In Aichele, George, and Gary Phillips, eds. *Intertextuality and the Bible*. Semeia.(69-70) (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1995), 7.

4 Aichele, and Philips, “Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis,” 8.

and resolved to get the land of Naboth. She plotted against Naboth for the king. She wrote letters to the elders and nobles to organize a fast day, wherein few scoundrels would bear false witness against Naboth by which he would be stoned to death. Everything took place just as she plotted. Once the news reached the queen that Naboth was killed, Jezebel encouraged her husband to take possession of Naboth's land. However, it was displeasing to the Lord. The Lord sent Elijah to meet the king to convey God's judgment against the king and the queen.

2. Text Two – the Special Economic Zone Act

The Indian Parliament passed the Special Economic Zone Act in 2005.⁵ A Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a geographical region that has economic laws that are more liberal than a country's normal economic laws.⁶ In India, the government has been proactive in the development of the SEZs. They have formulated policies, reviewed them occasionally and have ensured that ample facilities are provided to the developers of the SEZs as well as to the companies setting up units in the SEZs. They are often developed under a public-private partnership arrangement, in which the public sector provides some level of support (provision of off-site infrastructure, equity investment, soft loans, bond issues, etc.) to enable a private sector developer to obtain a reasonable rate of return on the project (typically 10-20% depending on risk levels). Currently, India has 1022 units in operation in 9 functional SEZs, each an average size of 200 acres (0.81 km²).⁷ However, attempts to set up a SEZ in Nandigram in West Bengal, Dharavi Island in Maharashtra, Jagatsinghur in Orissa, etc., have led to protests by villagers and violence in those areas.⁸ Some of the implications of such a SEZ policy are the following:

- 5 The Gazette of India, Extraordinary Part II – Section I, Published by authority [no. 31] New Delhi, Thursday, June 23, 2005, Ministry of Law and Justice, (legislative department).
- 6 Refer to *Rally* Vol.83/12 May 2007. The whole issue discusses about the SEZ. It has a special supplement with summaries of its contents and impacts. Some of the following implications are taken from this same issue.
- 7 For further information refer to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Economic_Zone#List_of_SEZs_in_India.
- 8 Nandigram is a rural area in Purba Medinipur district of West Bengal. In 2007

a) *Massive requirement of land:* As of December 2008 the Central government has given formal approval to 552 SEZs in 19 states; 272 of these have been notified. Reportedly, hundreds more have been proposed to the Board of Approvals (BoA), and a majority of them have likely received what is known as 'in-principle approval.' The area being acquired by all the SEZs with "in-principle approval" is close to 200,000 hectares (2000 sq kms, or greater than the area of Delhi in the National Capital Region).

b) *Forced acquisition of land:* Despite definite and clear guidelines provided by the Ministry of Commerce and the Empowered Group of Ministers in April 2007, all states are using the less troublesome and more expedient Land Acquisition Act of 1894 to forcefully acquire land for SEZs, that too without making any provision for rehabilitation.

c) *Landless and Agricultural laborers displaced without compensation:* Almost 80% of the agricultural population in India owns only about 17% of the total agricultural land, making them near-landless workers.

d) *Destruction of land-based economy:* Loss of local economy—agriculture, fisheries, salt pans, artisan, handloom and other traditional livelihoods leading to large scale displacement and food insecurity. The bulk of the land being acquired for SEZs is fertile, agricultural land, especially in the case of the multi-product zones. Agricultural scientists have estimated that close to 1.14 lakh farming households (each household on an average comprising five members) and an additional 82,000 farm worker families who are dependent upon these farms for their livelihood, will be displaced. The total loss of

the West Bengal government decided to allow Salim Group to set up a chemical hub at Nandigram under the SEZ policy. This led to resistance by the villagers resulting in clashes with the police that left 14 villagers dead, and accusations of police brutality. Dharvi Island in Maharashtra consists of ten villages and are part of Mumbai Municipal Corporation's jurisdiction. Though the 60% of the land belongs to the Govt., the remaining 40% i.e., 6672 acres belong to farmers and fishermen of them 90% are Catholics. In the district of Jagatsinghpur in Orissa, the govt. has already allotted 1,620 hectares to the POSCO, a South Korean company proposing to establish a steel plant. Most of the land, besides being under forest, has betel vines cultivation coupled with paddy by the small land holders.

income to the farming and the farm worker families will be Rs.212-crore a year. This does not include other incomes lost due to the destruction of local economies.

e) *Exploitative employment opportunities*: The power of the development Commissioner to declare SEZs as “public utility services” under the Industrial Disputes Act would mean that in SEZ areas workers will have no right to strike and collective bargain for better wages or working conditions. The SEZ policy of the government transfers all the powers of the state Labour Commissioner to the Development Commissioners of the SEZs.

3. Intertextual Reading

At the outset it needs to be pointed out that the story of Ahab is a late entry into the historical books (most probably belongs to the mid 5th century BCE). Considering the indeterminate and general beginning, non-mentioning of the city of Naboth and basing on many of the linguistic evidences found within the text, Alexander Rofé suggested that “it voices the complaint of the oppressed against the upper class, elsewhere vented by Nehemiah, Malachi and Trito-Isaiah as well as the protest against intermarriage as broached by Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah. All in all, 1 Kings xxi appears to be an important source for the history of Judah in the midst of the Persian period.”⁹ Now let us focus on the three main characters of the story.

1. King Ahab

Ahab inherited a well established and an economically strong kingdom from his father Omri.¹⁰ However, in general Ahab has a negative image in the deuteronomistic and prophetic traditions in the

9 Rofé, Alexander, “The Vineyard of Naboth: The Origin and Message of The Story,” *Vetus Testamentum* 38/1 (1988), 89-104, esp. page 102; cf also Cronauer who agrees to the Persian period but considers it as the second edition of the Dtr. Cronauer, Patrick T., *The Stories about Naboth the Jezreelite: A Source, Composition, and Redaction Investigation of 1 Kings 21 and Passages in 2 Kings 9* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 424; London/New York: Clark, 2005), 186.

10 Bright, John *A History of Israel*, 3rd edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981), 240-248.

Biblical history.¹¹ Ahab was the king of the flourishing northern Kingdom, Israel. He lived in a palace with a huge plot of land around it as against Naboth with the vineyard, which was normal for any small farmer of that time. Ahab would have thought that as a king he could acquire anything that he desired. He came to Naboth and asked, "Give me your vineyard to be my vegetable garden" (1 Kgs 21:2). The traditional 'give', although a literal translation of the Hebrew root '*ntn*', is misleading in this context. In the documents from Ugarit the cognate Ugaritic '*yn*' and the cognate Accadian '*nadanu*' are precisely the technical terms for "sell", although they also cover donations of various kinds. The same usage prevails in Hebrew commerce.¹² His own father Omri had purchased land in the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two silver talents where he built his capital Samaria (1 Kgs 16:24). The king further enticed Naboth by saying that he would even give "a better vineyard in exchange or its value in money" (1 Kgs 21:2). Unfortunately, Ahab's desire to get hold of the vineyard of Naboth could not be fulfilled as the God fearing small farmer would not give it to the king due to his deep rooted religious reasons and sentiments. This grounded the king totally. The king was not willing to let go and attend to his royal duties. He withdrew from public life and sulked in his private chamber. The king did not understand that there was a limit to the exercise of his authority and power.

However, he was the king. Many people who lusted for supremacy depended on the power and authority of the king. It would not be in their vested interest that the king's desire, however mean and illegal it might be, was left unfulfilled, lest their own positions would be at stake. Therefore, a few of the elders and nobles of the city of Naboth and the two *belials* (worthlessmen)¹³ under the leadership of the queen

11 Freedman, David Noel, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, Vol. I (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 100.

12 Andersen, I Francis, "The Socio-Juridical Background of Naboth Incident," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 85/1 (1966), 46-57, esp. 48-49.

13 The term '*belial*', out of its twenty-seven occurrences in the Old Testament, is used fifteen times within the Deuteronomistic history. Besides the term's reference to juridical and cultic abuses, according to Benedikt Otzen, it also refers to those people who undermine the kingdom. Refer. Benedikt Otzen,

Jezebel organized a plot to eliminate Naboth. They succeeded in their vicious plan and finally we are told that the king Ahab went to take possession of the Land of Naboth (1 Kgs 21:10). Was Ahab as a ruler justified in his action? Was he innocent while his own people did what was illegal and unjustly appropriated the land in his very name? "Upon what basis does the power of the king as the representative of state authority rest? On the power of weaponry? On inherited legitimacy? On personal authority? On his 'innocence' (in the sense of 1 Samuel 25) as an arbitrator? On the support of his political program by the people or the 'princes' (officers, bureaucrats, heads of the large clans)?"¹⁴ The law of the land did not permit the king to covet the land of his subjects. Ahab knew very well the laws concerning a ruler. Yet, one only has to remember what prophet Samuel had already predicted concerning the kings: "He will take best of your fields, vineyards and olive groves..." (1 Sam 8:14).

The above issue should be understood in the larger picture of Israel and Judah in the 8th century BCE. It was a period of tremendous political power and economic growth unlike any other period in their history. The beneficiaries of this economic growth were the ruling elite who dominated the state bureaucracy, who were able to corner large amounts of the economic surplus. The cumulative effect of the above was the deterioration of the plight of peasantry. The primary base of the economy of that time, as of now, was the land. Thus, the cause of all problems was the latifundialization – "it is the growth of large estates. The small plots of land, to which the common peasants have access for residence and cultivation of staples, are taken over by the landed elite. The accumulation of land grows in inverse proportion to the number of people owning land."¹⁵ Once the large estates were

"belial" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W. B. Eerdmans, 1972-73), 134-135.

14 Schulte, Hannelis, "The End of The Omride Dynasty: Social-Ethical Observations on The Subject of Power and Violence." In *Ethics and Politics in The Hebrew Bible*, eds Douglas A. Knight and Carol Myers et al., vol. 66, *Semeia*. (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1994 [1995]), 133.

15 Premnath, D. N., *Eight Century Prophets: A social Analysis*, (St. Louis,

established, the subsistent agriculture was transformed into a commercial one, which resulted in the growth of urban centres at the cost of villages, growth of trade based on luxury items, growth of militarization, and a weakened judiciary. All these data on 'growth' actually meant doom for the poor peasantry.

Today's Ahabs are the present-day Indian and foreign industrialists and corporate executives.¹⁶ Their lust for profit and their desire to outdo each other, all in the name of development of the economy, escorts them to the Naboths of our poor and small land holders. Salim SEZ, Kakinada SEZ, GMR SEZ, Jindal SEZ or Posco SEZ are some of these Ahabs. From the rag-to-riches story of the Ambani family is an inspiration for these Ahabs. Dhurubai Ambani who started his career with Rs 15,000 had amassed a huge turn over of Rs. 75,000 crores by the time he died.¹⁷ In the 1980s, allegations were raised in Parliament and in newspapers that Ambani was a master manipulator and that he received favours from politicians, cajoled officials to interpret the rules his way, brought down endless audits and inspections on his rivals, and reportedly had the power even to make or break governments.¹⁸ The Salim Group is Indonesia's biggest conglomerate with assets including Indofood Sukses Mamur, the world's largest instant noodle producer, and Bogasari, a large flour-milling operation.¹⁹ This Salim group demanded 5,000 acres from the government of West Bengal to develop a township at Kukrahati.²⁰ The GMR Group is a Bangalore

Missouri, Chalice Press: 2003), 20. The author logically delineates the impacts of the latifundialization which is very relevant to us even to our modern times.

- 16 Napier, Davie "The Inheritance and the Problem of Adjacency", *Interpretation* 30 (1976), pp 3-11. He critiques his own country, the USA as Ahab, "We know, none so well, how stained is our national record; we know with what envious eyes our own business and military and political Ahabs regard the inheritance of third world Naboths and take it, if necessary, after bearing false witness against Naboth. " p.7.
- 17 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhirubhai_Ambani. Accessed on Monday, December 14, 2009.
- 18 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,501020722-320795,00.html>. Accessed on Monday, December 14, 2009.
- 19 *Business Times & Asian Wall Street Journal* (June 1998).
- 20 *The Hindu*, 4 November 2006. <http://www.hindu.com/2006/11/04/stories/2006110402361700.htm>. Retrieved 2007-09-06.

headquartered global infrastructure major with interests in Airports, Energy, Highways and Urban infrastructure. The Tamil Nadu Government gave to the GMR around 3300 acres to develop a multi-product SEZ.²¹ The Andhra Pradesh Government is acquiring 8,500 acres of arable land in Kakinada to set up a Kakinada SEZ.²² The government of West Bengal had agreed to the Jindal group of Industry's proposal to establish a steel plant in West Midnapore. The Jindal group has asked for 4,500 acres of land. The newspapers also reported that the Cabinet has also given its nod to the company to directly acquire and purchase 3,500 acres to build an airport at Andal in Burdwan district.²³ The POSCO, the South Korean company, was approved for a multi-product SEZ in Jagatsinghpur District, Orissa, with an area of 1601.6 hectares.²⁴ According to the "Fact Sheet on SEZ" the land that has already been notified as SEZ is 39,685 hectares; formally approved for SEZ is 73,731 hectares; in-principle to be approved is 1,25,263 hectares which will all totally come to 1,990 Sq.Km.²⁵ Though the government says that the total area for the proposed SEZ is 1990 sq. km. which would not be more than 0.066% of the total land area and not be more than 0.122% of the total Agricultural land in India. In real terms the total area of land thus earmarked is large in relation to the landless Indian population. Moreover, a fairly large number of Indian Parliamentarians and a few central ministers are themselves industrialists. One can easily imagine what impact they have on SEZ-related legislations.

Due to the small farmers' and small land holders' unwillingness to part with their land today's Ahabs are angry and are arm twisting the

21 <http://www.gmrgroup.co.in/branchindex.aspx?branchid=20>. Accessed on Saturday, December 12, 2009.

22 www.hindu.com/2009/12/08/stories/2009120856600400.htm. Accessed on Saturday, December 12, 2009.

23 iExpressindia (29/10/2009) <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Cabinet-nod-for-SEZ-status-to-Jindal-steel-plant/354873/>.

24 <http://www.orissadiary.com/ShowBusinessNews.asp?id=3081>. accessed on Saturday, December 12, 2009.

25 <http://seziindia.nic.in/HTMLS/Fact%20sheet%20on%20SEZs%20as%20on%2014%5B1%5D.9.09%20-%20doc.pdf>. Accessed on Saturday, December 12, 2009.

authorities to get what they desire. At least the biblical Ahab in principle was willing to give a better vineyard or its value in money. But today's Ahabs do not offer either land for exchange or its current market price for the land. While the victims are protesting against the high-handedness of the government, the Ahabs make use of every pressure tactics and find ever new ways and means to achieve their goals. These wealthy industrialists and corporate executives know the laws of the land very well. They make use of the loopholes of the very same laws to their advantage.

2. *Queen Jezebel*

Jezebel was the daughter of the Phoenician king Ittobaal (Baal exists). Her name has probably been changed from the Phoenician *iy-zevul* (where is the prince) to *iy-zevel* (where is the rubbish) by the transmutation of vowels in the Masoretic text.²⁶ The Deuteronomistic historian is very clear about his impressions of the queen – it was totally a negative one – she was not an Israelite woman, and she polluted Israel with Baal worship. However, a note of caution is to be placed first – here the paper does not identify the queen with any gender bias.²⁷ It will become clear that she stands for a group of people, who deviously plot and execute their plans to promote their exclusive interests.

While the story pictures Ahab as a weak and sulking king, it portrays Jezebel as a strong, self-confident and gifted administrator. However, it should be noted that, while Ahab was familiar with the socio-religious customs about inheritance, Jezebel, the Phoenician, was unaware of it. Considering the limitations set upon the Phoenicians by the narrowness of their coastal plain, it is not surprising that they sought to augment their economy through trade and commerce.²⁸ Born and

26 Shoffren, Marc, "Educational Approaches to Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)," *The Journal of Progressive Judaism* 13/Nov (1999), 13; cf also BDB, 33.

27 For a sympathetic reading of the character of Jezebel refer to Pippin, Tina, "Jezebel Re-Vamped," in Brenner, Athalya (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings*, (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield: 1994) 196-206.

28 Hoffner, H. A., "Phoenicia," Tenney, Merrill C. (Ed), *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol.4 (Zondervan, Grandrapids, Michigan: 1976), 778-782.

brought up in the Phoenician court, Jezebel had acquired a talent for intrigue, treason and deception. When she saw her husband brooding and sulking due to the rejection of Naboth, she plunged herself into action. She knew how to aggrandize her own power in his name. She found loyal accomplices in the elders, nobles and the two belials who would do anything she demanded as they knew that they stood to gain greatly from collaborating with her.

She was cunning enough to make use of the very law of curse against the king and the Lord (Exo 22:28) to bring death to Naboth. When Ahab asked for the land, Naboth had replied, "I am forbidden by God". However, when the belials gave false witness they quoted Naboth having cursed God and the king. In an almost poetical twist, Jezebel has Naboth condemned for profaning God and the king.²⁹ Shrewdly, Jezebel organized a fast in which Naboth became the leader. This was the time of draught, famine and starvation. It was normal to call for a day of fast to search for sinners who would have caused it. At the end of the Second Commonwealth and beyond, there existed a custom of publicly confessing individual guilt on a fast day, as attested by Josephus in his *Vita* and in rabbinic lore.³⁰ Thus Jezebel, by ordering a fast in the king's name, by putting Naboth at the head of the assembly and then having him charged with sacrilege against God and the king, obtained a special procedure with an instant condemnation and execution, a kind of lynch law of ancient times.³¹ However, a careful reader would see through the discrepancy – the two belials instead of seeing Naboth eye to eye and accuse him in the second person, chose to speak about him in the third person "Naboth cursed God and the king" (1 Kgs 21:13). There was no time given to Naboth to defend himself, nor was there a Daniel found among the people to speak for him. Immediately the whole assembly seemed to have come to the

29 Shoffren, Marc, "Educational Approaches to Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21)" *Journal of Progressive Judaism*, no 13/ Nov. (1999), 12.

30 Baumann, A., "Naboths Fasttag und Josephus", *Theokratia Jahrbuch des Institutum Judaicum Dehtzschianum* II (1970-1972), *Festgabe für Ê H Rengstorf zum 70 Geburtstag* (Leiden, 1973), pp 26-44.

31 Seebass, Ç., "Der Fall Naboth in I Reg xxi", *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974), 481.

judgment – stone him to death! They went about doing it without any compunction.

Then the victorious Jezebel came to Ahab to tell him that the obstruction to his desire has been eliminated: “Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth” (1 Kgs 21:15). She did not tell that she made use of his very name and his seal, his nobles and elders and the very socio-religious customs of the natives to destroy Naboth. The king seemed to be the least bothered about it. For, as soon as he heard the news from Jezebel, the author reports that the king “arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it” (21:16).

Today’s Jezebels are our own politicians, the bureaucrats and even some judges. The political leaders are elected democratically by the people of this country, to whom these leaders had made a promise of ‘all round development’. While every other trade and profession demands a minimum set of qualifications and an end to their function at some age, our leaders have no need of such qualifications or age limit. The only qualification that they skillfully acquired for themselves is that they are democratically elected. However, once they get elected and form the government, they wield enormous power and authority to determine and give direction to the development of the nation. And yet, irrespective of the party they belong to, the majority of them behave with one motto – self-aggrandizement. They are ambitious and their desires have no limit.³²

The bureaucrats are well qualified and are governed by rules and regulations, yet some of them behave as masters and rulers instead of servants of the government. The former district magistrate of Patna, Mr. Gautam Goswami IAS, was charge-sheeted for embezzling Rs.13.54 crores.³³ He was also accused of misappropriation of Rs 1.52 crore meant for *Swarna Jayanti Swa Rojgar Yojna* and National

32 One only have to look at the very recent episode of Madhu Koda, who before becoming a MLA/MP went about walking and cycling has been accused of having amassed wealth worth Rs. 4,000 Crores! Ramakrishnan, Venkitesh, “Deep Pockets of Jharkhand,” *Frontline* (December 4, 2009), 123-125.

33 <http://imsports.rediff.com/news/2005/aug/05goswami.htm>. Accessed on Thursday, December 17, 2009.

Slum Development Programme during his tenure as district magistrate of Patna.³⁴ Most of our popular journals endlessly write investigative articles on the financial scams of various officials of our country.³⁵

On 14 December, 2009, the 76 Rajyasabha Members of Parliament sought impeachment of the chief Justice of an Indian State, on the basis of “alleged accumulation of wealth beyond known sources of income; possession of plots in favour of relatives; ‘benami’ transactions; acquisition of agricultural holding beyond the ceiling imposed by the Tamil Nadu government; illegal occupation of government property, depriving Dalits of land; violation of their human rights; destruction of evidence; obstructing officials from discharging their duties; undervaluation of property; illegal construction in violation of town laws; and abuse of judicial office.”³⁶ The Central Government chose to evade a firm decision and responded to the collegium’s report by stating that the matter is to be decided by Chief Justice of India (CJI).³⁷ However, with the acceptance of the impeachment move, the law will take its course. Earlier, on 7 July, 2008, the Supreme Court requested the Solicitor General to advise it on a petition seeking a judicial probe into the multi-crore provident fund scam in Ghaziabad, allegedly involving 26 sitting judges of the Allahabad High Court and serving as well as retired judges of the apex court.³⁸

The politician-bureaucrat-judge nexus is invincibly strong for it is they who enact and execute, judge and interpret the law of the land. They are quite intelligent and know what they are doing. Their

34 <http://in.rediff.com/news/2005/jun/27bihar.htm>. Accessed on Thursday, December 17, 2009.

35 Pillai, Ajith, “Scam India,” *Frontline*, Mar, 20, 1996, found in <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?201037>. Accessed on Thursday, December 17, 2009.

36 <http://www.hindu.com/2009/12/15/stories/2009121557330100.htm>. Accessed on Thursday, December 17, 2009.

37 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/SC-collegium-scraps-Dinakaras-chances-of-promotion/articleshow/5349928.cms>. Accessed on Monday, December 21, 2009.

38 <http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/newdelhi/Judicial-probe-sought-in-Ghaziabad-PF-scam/Article1-322464.aspx>. Accessed on Thursday, December 17, 2009.

knowledge together with political power makes them potent, remorseless and reckless. Just like Jezebel they make use of the name of the government and its seal to falsify and subvert the law and exploit the poor and landless people. They literally help the industrialists and the corporate executives to usurp the lands of the poor. The SEZ Act was passed in haste without much public debate. There was no public consultation, participation or debate on the SEZ Act. In both houses of the Indian Parliament this bill was passed within a day (10th and 11th May 2005) with virtually no discussion, undermining many of the objections that were raised. The entire process of approval of SEZs was undemocratic and extremely centralized with the Board of Administrators approving close to 30 SEZs in a two-hour meeting based on virtually no information about the companies. Further, the information that has been demanded from the Ministry of Commerce on the approved projects under the RTI Act, 2005, has been denied because of the clause of maintaining "trade secrets". The RTI is perhaps the only law the citizens of India can use against the ruling elites' omissions and commissions. Understandably various very restless authorities are advocating urgent amendments to the RTI. This has been done despite the fact that many of these projects have initiated acquisition procedures displacing livelihoods of a large number of people and therefore the information about them should be provided in public interest.³⁹

3. Naboth

He is from the town of Jezreel, one which by the time of Ahab had become the winter capital of the Israelite kingdom. As a political centre, the town was the setting for a number of sanguinary events.⁴⁰ Due to urbanization the demand for land had risen and Naboth's land which was near Ahab's palace became the object of desire for the King. However, land was the concrete symbol of God's blessing. In the early period after the Israelites had settled in Palestine, the whole population had equal access to land. Each Israelite tribe settled in a certain area.

39 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_Economic_Zone#List_of_SEZs_in_India. Accessed on Thursday, December 17, 2009.

40 Hunt, Melvin, "Jezreel," in Freedman, David Noel (Ed), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:850.

Tribal custom was developed to ensure that the land stayed with the tribes. With the advent of the monarchy and the shift from a rural agricultural economy to an urban money economy, however, a movement of dispossession and disruption of ancient Israelite society occurred which undermined the old social order.⁴¹

The response of Naboth was that, since the land was the inheritance from his ancestors, the property had to be handed on from generation to generation. It provided the basic foundation for the life of Israel's peasant community. Moreover, ownership of such land was protected by Israel's God, Yahweh, in the 10th commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbour's house" (Exod 20:17). This commandment does not only mean the physical building, but it refers equally to the land on which the house is situated. In many Old Testament texts this land is called "the inheritance of the fathers."

Naboth's refusal was uncompromising, reproachful of the dispossession of his land. He argued with the king in his simple logic – "the inheritance of my fathers." He was fully supported by the law of God for his people: "Thus no inheritance of the sons of Israel shall be transferred from tribe to tribe, for the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (Num 36:7). Therefore it is understandable that Naboth withheld it from sale. He went about his daily course of his life without any further anxiety. However, he was totally unaware that he had become an obstacle to the happiness of the powerful, and they would go to any length and do anything to silence him. When the town's elders called for a fast, Naboth not only attended it but accepted to lead the fast without knowing the evil designs of the royal family and their wicked supporters. His opponents were so malevolent that he did not even have the space and time to raise his voice in protest. He was condemned one-sidedly and stoned to death.

41 Wittenberg, Günther H., "The Significance of Land in the Old Testament," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 77/Dec. (1991), 58. See also the same article for the various ways in which the powerful dispossessed the lands of the poor.

It is interesting to hear from Jezebel reporting to her husband, "Naboth is not alive, but dead" (1 Kgs 21:15). His life had become a threat and a nuisance to the royal family for not having agreed to part with his land. The very people who were supposed to protect and promote the rights of the poor were the ones who opposed, misused and sabotaged the law. In the death of the poor, the king seemed to get life, for he rose from his sulking to take possession of the land. Alas, the king was totally unaware that the Lord God neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psa 121: 3-4).

The life of today's Naboths is no different from that of the biblical Naboth. They are the poor and the marginalized land holders. They are simple and believe in the laws of the land. They are God-fearing. They are not even aware that the Ahabs and the Jezebels are making vicious plans to grab whatever little they hold as their own, which give them their identity and self-worth besides their economic sustenance. Even in the Newspaper reports and the news analyses of the Journals there is hardly any reporting and analyses from the perspective of these poor and marginalized land-holders. Everyone speaks of the quantum of land dispossessed and acquired but hardly is there any human face added to such reports.

A study by the Vadodara-based Centre for Culture and Development (CCD) states that 32 lakh hectares of land were used for development projects in Gujarat between 1947 and 2004, as a result of which 2 million people, a good 5% of the state's population, were displaced.⁴² Of the approved SEZ, 80% fall along the coastal areas. It will affect the lives of thousands of fisher folk who will lose livelihood based on sea.⁴³ What about those landless laborers who are totally dependent

42 http://sez.icrindia.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=91:tossed-aside-in-the-fast-lane-to-growth&catid=9:articles&Itemid=11. Accessed on Saturday, December 19, 2009.

43 http://sez.icrindia.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=93:sezs-stirring-up-a-storm-along-the-indian-coast-&catid=9:articles&Itemid=11. accessed on Saturday, December 19, 2009.

on the land of the small and marginal land-holders? Moreover, the landless laborers are mainly from the Dalit and the tribal communities, whose cry we hardly hear and whose face we rarely see.⁴⁴ According to Fatima Burnad of the Tamil Nadu *Dalit* Women's Movement, the *impact of SEZs* has affected the lives of *Dalit* women negatively.⁴⁵ While the biblical Ahab at least waited for the death of Naboth before he went to take possession of the coveted land, today's Ahabs snatch land from the hands of today's Naboths and walk about as if nothing has happened.

Conclusion

Is it enough for us to read the text with very many methods and bring out the relevant meanings for us today? By our intertextual reading from the perspective of the biblical characters we have come to identify the faceless people involved in the SEZ. Will such readings in any way change the situation of today's Naboths? When will Elijahs rise from among us to face the Ahabs and Jezebels to warn and challenge them? Let these Elijahs become the voice of the silenced and suppressed survivors of the SEZ.

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44 <http://out-caste.blogspot.com/2008/04/sez-land-and-dalits.html>. Accessed on Saturday, December 19, 2009; Cfr also the Statement of the National Consultation on "Dalits & Tribals: Together in Mission", held at CNI Bhavan, New Delhi, 2-4 April 2008, <http://www.nccindia.in/resources/view.htm?no=80>. Accessed on Saturday, December 19, 2009.

45 http://suruma.com/suspended.page/?option=com_content&view=article&id=6734:landless-dalit-women-worst-hit-by-sez&catid=5:dalitsatribals&Itemid=14. Accessed on Saturday, December 12, 2009.

Matthew's Insistence on Right Action over Rites and Doctrines

Henry Pattarumadathil

Henry Pattarumadathil SJ begins his article with the hard realities of the Indian Church that predominantly prefers orthodoxy to orthopraxis. After situating the Gospel in the socio-pastoral context of the Matthean community, the author examines the teaching of the Matthean Jesus opting for compassionate inclusivism over against contemptuous exclusivism, for exceeding righteousness as opposed to slavish legalism, for authenticity in place of hypocrisy, and for genuine deeds instead of empty words.

Introduction

“On the whole we don’t take Jesus seriously – whether we call ourselves Christians or not. There are some remarkable exceptions, but by and large we don’t love our enemies, we don’t turn the other cheek, we don’t forgive seventy times seven times, we don’t bless those who curse us, we don’t share what we have with the poor, and we don’t put all our hope and trust in God. We have our excuses.”¹ The above observation Fr. Albert Nolan makes in the introductory paragraph of his new book *Jesus Today: A Spirituality for Radical Freedom* is true of the Indian Church today.

The notion of faith projected in the Indian Church is predominantly ‘orthodoxical’. An uncritical adherence to Church doctrines, a

1 A. Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality for Radical Freedom*, St. Pauls, Mumbai, 2008, p. 19.

submissive loyalty to the Church hierarchy and regular performance of cults and rituals are reckoned and taught as the most sublime expressions of faith. On the contrary, 'ortho-praxis' dimension of faith which demands inter-human relationships and socio-political involvements is generally neglected, if not deliberately discouraged. Bible conventions, healing sessions, novenas and the like are organized on a massive scale. Mushrooming retreat centres compete with each other to attract people to their brand of spirituality. They entice people to live in a 'spiritual stupor' enjoying solace for their souls, but turning a deaf ear to the question 'where is your brother/sister?' On the other hand, inter-caste animosities, inter-rite rivalries for power and position and intra-rite conflicts over liturgical rubrics have become part of the daily life of the Church. Our lips are quite active with 'halleluiahs', but how close are our hearts to God?

In the face of this reality this article attempts to highlight some passages from the Gospel of Matthew which reflect the evangelist's insistence on living an authentic Christian life by putting into practice the words and deeds of Jesus over against slavishly following the rigid doctrines of the Rabbinic Judaism of the day.

1. Matthew's Christian Community

Matthew's community is generally qualified as a community in transition. Till the Jewish revolt against the Romans and the consequent destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE, Christians and Jews had been coming together to worship in the temple and in the synagogues. But with the destruction of the temple, the Jews underwent a serious crisis with regard to their identity and faith as at the time of Babylonian exile of the 6th and Selukian hellenization of the 2nd centuries BCE. To revive and reform the vanishing Jewish religion and traditions a new movement, known as the Rabbinic Judaism, was established at Jamnia near the Mediterranean coast, under the leadership of Rabbi Johanna ben Zakkai. The Pharisees were the chief proponents of this new movement.

The brand of Judaism brought in by the Rabbis, who assumed absolute authority to interpret the Law and regulate Jewish life, was extremely orthodoxical. Strict adherence to the Law and the traditions

of the elders was insisted upon. To maintain Jewish identity and purity against the influence of non-Jews and dissenters severe sanctions were imposed. The Christians were labelled 'heretics' and expelled from the synagogues. Several scholars are of the opinion that Matthew wrote his gospel as a response to this orthodoxal Judaism which was awash with rules and regulations but devoid of both divine and human qualities.

Matthew did not want his community to follow the so-called religiosity of their Jewish contemporaries apparent in their shallow words and hypocritical deeds. He wanted them to be faithful to Jesus who manifests the human face of God through his words and deeds, and who desires mercy and not sacrifice (Matt 9,13; 12,7).

2. Compassionate Inclusivism

against contemptuous Exclusivism

Matthew begins his gospel listing out a genealogy of Jesus starting from Abraham down to Joseph (Matt 2,2-17). The reader may be reminded of the Jewish custom of enumerating the lineage of a person to show his reputation in society. Through the genealogy the evangelist places Jesus in the lengthy span of Israelite history and presents him as the fulfilment of the long awaited Messianic promise. Obviously, Matthew has compiled the genealogy of Jesus using the lists given in Ruth 4,8-22; 1Chr 1,34-2,15 and 1Chr 3,1-16. What is striking in the genealogy is the inclusion of four women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah) – three of them pagans, and the fourth the wife of a pagan. It must have really shocked the male members of the Matthean community to see these women's names in the ancestry of the Messiah. In fact, this could be seen as Matthew's first shock treatment to the puritanical, gender-biased orthodoxy which entertained the belief that the gentiles and women will have little role to play in the salvific mission of the Messiah.

Matthew maintains a theology of universalism throughout the gospel, though there are two or three texts in the gospel which might be misread at first sight as 'exclusivistic' (see 10,5; 15,24). The story of the gentile Magi who come to visit the new born King of the Jews (2,1-12), the faith expressions of the Centurion (8,5-13), the woman with hemorrhage (9,20-22) and the Canaanite woman (15,21-28), which move Jesus to act in favour of them, are examples of Matthew's stance for a truly Christian Church where everyone feels at home.

Unfortunately, Matthew's call for universalism still remains a theological cliché for the Church in India where one's caste or rite identity dominates and even fragments the Christian community.

3. Exceeding Righteousness against Slavish Legalism

The readers find Joseph, the fiancé of Mary, in a bewildered condition at the opening chapter of the gospel. Matthew qualifies him as a 'just man'. A just man is the one who obeys the Law. Now, if he follows the Law literally, he should take his fiancée Mary to her father's door and stone her to death (Deut 22,20-21) or he should hand her over to religious authorities for a cruel trial (see Num 5,11-31). Joseph boldly closes his eyes to the death commanding precepts of the Law, and decides to save his beloved from public shame and allow her to live. Thus, his legal father is presented as the first person who puts into practice the 'good news' – the freedom of the children of God – which the Messiah brought.

The story of the confusion of Joseph and the decision he makes was an indirect exhortation to those members in Matthew's community who were hesitant to embrace certain teachings of Jesus which demanded a radical departure from their Jewish traditions. They found it hard, as many of our Church leaders find it today, to believe that the sovereignty of love and compassion triumphs over the slavery of legalism.

Referring to the 'righteousness' of the scribes and Pharisees, in Matt 5,20 Jesus tells the disciples that if their righteousness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Certain aspects of this 'exceeding righteousness' can be understood from the 'new way' Jesus elaborates in the antitheses (5,21-48). Six examples from the Law are treated in the antitheses. Every time, after quoting a commandment from the OT, Jesus gives his teaching with respect to that commandment, framed with the formula 'but I tell you'. Three of these, the teachings on murder (5,21-22), adultery (5,27-28) and love for the neighbour (5,43-44), basically follow the precepts of the Mosaic Law but extend or deepen the demands. But the teachings on the other three – on divorce (5,31-32), oaths (5,33-37) and retaliation (5,38-39) – seem to reject Mosaic precepts as a standard of conduct for the disciples. These teachings show clearly the contrast between what the Mosaic Law

requires and what the Law as modified and reinterpreted by Jesus demands.

The righteousness Jesus wants his followers to pursue is not a mere performance of the Law as was practised by the scribes and Pharisees, but a genuine living that flows from their relationship with God, that makes them friends of the foes, brothers and sisters of distant strangers, salt and light of the world.

4. Authenticity against Hypocrisy

Matthew presents Jesus describing the people who pretend to be righteous, kind, prayerful, law abiding and so on as hypocrites (Matt 6,2.5.16; 15,7-9; 22,18; 23,13.15.23.25.27.29; Luke 13,15). In his teaching he uses very harsh language against them (cf. Matt 23,13-29). Denouncing the inauthentic show of the hypocrites, Jesus demands that his followers be authentic before God and human beings.

As a mode of behaviour, hypocrisy is 'the complete antithesis' of 'exceeding righteousness'. In Classical and Hellenistic Greek, a hypocrite is understood as an actor. An actor on the stage is only an actor; he has nothing to do with the reality behind the role he plays. The same person can act as a king or a beggar, as a hero or a villain, and once his mask is taken away, he has no association with the role he played. Similarly for the hypocrites these pious practices are like ready-made masks to be worn for a short time and later to be thrown away.

More than an actor, a hypocrite is understood in the LXX as a person who is pretentious and godless, and who has no fear of God. For their own selfish motive, to receive praise from people, they go on pretending that they practise righteous deeds. Being intoxicated with the desire for such human praise, they fear neither God nor human persons. That may be the reason why they make use even of religious means for their egotistic gains.

Hypocrites give alms in public in order to be seen by people. Referring to their behaviour, Jesus tells his disciples, "...when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets..." (6,2). Blowing a trumpet, especially in the OT, was to attract public attention. The location of their charitable acts - 'synagogues and streets' - also indicate their desire for a public show. By using these metaphors, Jesus figuratively hints at the display-

mania of the hypocrites. On the contrary, "... when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." It means, let nobody else, not even your other side, know about your charitable acts.

Alms are given normally to those who are deprived of their basic needs and are struggling to cope with their misery. When this is done in secret, the needs of the receiver would be met and his dignity respected. The followers of Jesus should treat persons in need not as means to acquire glory and praise but as brothers and sisters who are entrusted to their care. Indeed, there are many in our society, especially many lay people, who take this teaching of Jesus seriously and practise it. However, it is an invitation for many of us, who claim to do a lot of works of charity, to make a sincere examination of conscience.

Jesus comments also on the prayer of the hypocrites. They show themselves praying in the synagogues and at the street corners (Matt 6,5) with a well-hidden desire to gain honour for themselves. They direct their hearts not to God in faith, but to the public in pretence. Contrasting the ostentatious prayer style of the hypocrites, Jesus tells the disciples, "But when you pray, go into your inner chamber and shut the door and pray to your Father". The images of going to the inner chamber and shutting the door suggest an absolute secrecy in prayer. It emphasizes the importance of communion with the Father in prayer rather than its outward expression. The child who enters into communion with the Father in secret expresses his trust and confidence in the Father and experiences the Father's presence in his life. Jesus promises that such a child will surely be rewarded by the Father. In fact, the child's communion with the Father, a grace of faith, which is free from all social pressures and influences, is itself a great reward.

If Matthew were to speak to the Indian Church, he would have certainly accused it of display-mania. Whether it is a jubilee or a funeral, we do not miss any opportunity we get to show off our pomp and glory. We put up palatial buildings and call them 'churches'. We not only take pride in such shows, but qualify them as expressions of genuine faith. To protect the interests of the colossal institutions we have built up we send the faithful on the streets with rosaries and crosses in their hands and call such displays 'faith proclamation rallies'. Matthew may remind us of the story of the fig tree (21,18-22). The appearance of

the fig tree was quite deceptive, its thick green leaves might have given the impression that it was 'fruit-full' as the Jewish leaders impressed others with their hypocritical religiosity. But one cannot deceive God with appearances, he sees beyond the obvious. What God seeks is not ostentatious piety, but fruits of justice, love, kindness, brotherhood/sisterhood, honesty and the like. They alone can satisfy his hunger!

5. Genuine Deeds against Empty Words

What is the right faith expression that makes one worthy to enter the kingdom? This is the main issue discussed in 7,21-23. Anticipating a scene from the day of judgement, Jesus teaches the disciples, in this episode, the criterion by which all will be judged at the end. The first part of v.21 begins with negating a probable common assumption that all who say to Jesus 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom. As a contrast, the second part of the verse (21b) describes the type of people who will really enter the kingdom. They are identified as the ones who do the will of the Father of Jesus.

In Matthew the title 'Lord' is used for Jesus mostly by the disciples or the people who faithfully submit to his authority (see 8,2; 9,28; 14,28; 15,22; 16,22; 17,4; 18,21; 20,30 etc.). None of the opponents of Jesus ever addresses him as Lord. So the people who are denied entry into the kingdom are not the ones who oppose Jesus and his message but the ones who proclaim him as the Lord. They even claim that they had prophesied, cast out demons, and performed many mighty works in his name. Normally, having the power to do these things is considered a spiritual gift received from God. In fact, Jesus gives the disciples authority to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and cast out demons" before he sends them on a mission (10,8). By addressing Jesus as the Lord and repeatedly saying that they did great things in his name, they seem to claim that they too are his disciples and have the right to enter the kingdom. A contrast between 'saying' and 'doing' is pointed out here. To be accepted in the kingdom it is not enough to call Jesus 'Lord, Lord', but one must do the will of Jesus' Father.

It is possible to identify these people who will be denied entry into the kingdom as the ones who accepted the call of Jesus initially, assumed the role of the disciples, and even had the power to prophesy and

perform miracles, but who failed to live up to the demands of this call. They still pretend to be the followers of Jesus, but in truth they are not.

Jesus strongly denies any relationship with them declaring that he never knew them (7,23). When Jesus says 'I never knew you', it need not mean that he did not know them in the literal sense. Rather it would imply that he had no relation with them at all, neither in the past nor in the present. This means that even if they had been his disciples in the past, if they have not lived the requirements of this call, they cannot claim any relationship with Jesus; they will not be granted entry into the kingdom which is reserved for the true brothers and sisters of Jesus (12,50).

Their claim that they did great works in Jesus' name may be true, but their being able to perform these signs does not mean that they belong to him. They might have performed them as the hypocrites perform acts of righteousness, not to give glory to God but to seek their own glory, not to do the will of the Father but to do their own will.

The judge will chase these people out saying, "depart from me you doers of lawlessness!" (7,23). This condemnation expresses the displeasure of the judge at their presence in front of him. A similar rebuke is found in Ps 6,8, where the Psalmist makes a retort to his enemies who put him in a sinful situation. These people who claim to have done great works in Jesus' name are like the enemies of the Psalmist, whose deeds took the Psalmist away from God and pushed him into terror and misery. How many people might have been misled by their lawlessness!

Matthew has dealt with this theme of 'doing' in contrast to empty 'saying' in different contexts. In the parable of the Two Sons (21,28-30), the first son responds to the father's request with a firm 'no' in the beginning. But later he repents and does what his father wanted him to do. On the contrary, the second son is very polite in his words. He shows respect to the father addressing him as 'lord' and promises him that he will do the job. But he does not. The parable ends with a clear message that only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom. The need to put one's words into practice is stressed again in 23,3, which condemns the insincere preaching of the scribes and Pharisees: "so practise and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practise."

The parable of the Last Judgement which Matthew places as the climax of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel (25,31-46) explicitly expounds the core of Christian spirituality. On that day the sheep and the goats will be separated and judged according to their deeds and not according to their words. "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me'" (Matt 25, 34-36)."

Interestingly, (or surprisingly?), there is no reference to prayers, penances, sacrifices, dogmas, theological reflections and the like. What the Lord demands of his people is simple acts of kindness to their fellow human beings. The hunger, thirst, nakedness, sickness and loneliness of my brothers and sisters become the real points of reference of my salvation. Anyone who strives to alleviate the sorrows of his/her brothers and sisters and to make this world a better place to live in is a collaborator of God, and already a member of his kingdom.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this article with sharing an experience I recently had when I visited an old-age home run by government.² One of the inmates, Janakiamma, told me about the miseries the inmates were going through under a newly appointed supervisor who imposed some changes in the daily routine of the house. The staff and the inmates were quite pained by his rude behaviour. The inmates felt that he was treating them like useless animals, having nobody to bother about them. He cut down their weekly ration of milk and egg, restricted visitors, etc. After narrating their miserable condition under the administration of this man, she told me "Father, one thing I am sure that this man does not belong to your group". I did not get the picture well; understanding my confusion she continued, "I mean that he is not a Christian, I am convinced, because you Christians, who believe in

2 I have narrated this experience in another article, see H. Pattarumadathik, "You are a Blessing to the World", in *Asian Journal for Priests and Religious*, July (2009), 8-15.

Jesus, cannot treat poor people like this. You are a blessing to the world”.

Like Janakiamma, there are many people in India, belonging to other religious traditions, who has a great admiration for Christians in their hearts. They admire Christianity not because of its dogmas and doctrines, nor because of its rites and rituals, nor because of its institutions, but because of some of its daughters and sons who take Jesus seriously and live an authentic life, radiating light to their surroundings through their good works, through their commitment to the poor and needy. Unfortunately, that face of Christianity is fading away. The dehumanizing values of consumerism and globalization influence also the life of Christian. Most of our schools and hospitals which were started to cater to the needs of the poor people are being altered as money-making institutions. The dioceses and religious congregations compete with each other to start new institutions for the elite in the metropolitan cities. Claiming minority rights they manipulate the government machinery for these institutions. To safeguard our institutional interests we are ready to bow down and even worship any satanic power. In short, the image of the Church we project today in India is not a Church of Jesus but of the rich.

We may boast of our achievements in the spiritual and catechetical field, by pointing to the masses of people who gather at the retreat centres and the ‘renewal programmes’ we organize in every nook and corner, the liturgical reforms we have initiated, the catechetical formation we impart to our children, or the expansion of the Church we have achieved through the new dioceses in the mission areas, etc. But, Jesus of Matthew may not be impressed by all our claims of achievements. He may warn us in the words of prophet Micah: “He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic 6,8).

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“Go and Tell” and “Women should be Silent” A Feminist Reading of Jesus’ Commission and Paul’s Injunction

Pauline Chakkalakal

Pauline Chakkalakal DSP begins the article with an analysis of the status of women in India today. She then examines Jesus’ commission to women to announce the good news taking the Semitic background into account (Matthew 28: 10 and John 20:17), and Paul’s controversial text on women’s silence in the context of the socio-cultural background of the Corinthian community (1 Cor 14:34-35). In the light of these New Testament teachings, she challenges the existing patriarchal ideology which excludes women from leadership roles in the Church.

Introduction

Christianity begins with Jesus and derives its spirit and impulse from him. Grippled by God in Christ Jesus, Paul of Tarsus has brought new light into the lives of women and men through his personal experience of the risen Christ and proclamation of the Gospel. In him we have both an intellectual and a spiritual genius, who could penetrate the mystery of Christ and construct a doctrinal and mystical work of capital importance.

Nevertheless, Paul has been a controversial figure from the earliest times. His writings on women are classic examples that have evoked negative reactions to the point of labelling him a “woman hater”. Many hold him responsible for negating the freedom won for women by Jesus and denigrating them to a subservient position. Throughout the

centuries and even today Pauline authority has been invoked to perpetuate female domestication in the church.

While Jesus is presented as accepting women and their partnership in his ministry in an astonishing manner, Paul is often portrayed as a male chauvinist. In fact, Pauline texts on the role and status of women have become tools in the hands of fundamentalists to justify and perpetrate women's subordination in many ecclesial communities.

This paper is a modest attempt to explore the liberative potential in the teaching and praxis of both Jesus and Paul. It is not my intention to place Jesus and Paul in opposition. On the contrary, it is to ascertain that a comprehensive study of Paul against his socio-cultural and religious milieu would reveal the mind of Jesus in Paul.

In our effort to develop an Indian hermeneutics, it is important to grapple with the Indian reality, characterized by its diversity of cultures, languages, religions and spiritual aspirations as well as the ugly face of caste, class, sex and gender based divisive forces. In spite of the country's achievements, poverty, illness, inadequate health care, illiteracy, unemployment, etc. are other aspects of Indian reality. However, our analysis will be confined to the role and status of women.

A clear understanding of feminist consciousness and hermeneutical method is integral to our discussion. This helps us to unearth the lost 'feminist coin'¹ from the biblical tradition and recapture the original dignity and equality of woman and man (Gen 1: 26-27; Gal 3:26-28). In the process we learn the art of listening to the *silent* and *silenced* voices within the text. It is a procedure that demands authenticity and openness to respond truthfully to the claims made by the text and the issues raised.

1. Women in the Indian Context

Like most communities across the globe, Indian society too is highly patriarchal. Women are victims of multiple inequalities, which are the

1 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 16 : "Just as the woman in the parable sweeps the whole house in search of her lost coin, so feminist critical interpretation searches for the lost traditions and visions of liberation among its inheritance of androcentric biblical texts and their interpretations."

by-products of centuries-long socio-cultural, religious, economic and political discriminatory practices. In the laws of Manu, their social mobility, economic freedom and personal liberty are more or less fully curtailed and brought under the control of the men-folk in the family.² No wonder then that Manu, the greatest lawgiver of the Hindus, assigned to women “perpetual legal minority, making them subject to fathers in childhood, husbands in youth and sons in old age.”³

Despite the long revered tradition of *Shakti* (goddess worship as the ultimate form of Godhead), in reality women are under great social control and scrutiny. By means of socialization, “women are forced to express their subordination through ‘feminine’ words, voice and syntax.”⁴ In patriarchal cultures, men determine the general system of meanings evolved out of male experiences. Operating on a sexist ideology, with its notion of male superiority, patriarchy devalues women and keeps them in a state of second class citizenship. The functioning of traditional *panchayats*, either of villages or caste groups, illustrates this point. Decision-making for the community and the exercise of political power are still regarded as almost exclusive male domains.

Just as patriarchy pervades all areas of women’s life in society, so too church structures and doctrines control and domesticate Christian women. For instance, gender discrimination that is perpetuated through androcentric biblical interpretations, theological articulations, sexist language and all-male leadership in many churches. Because religious patriarchy considers itself to be divinely ordained, women in the churches, by and large, have succumbed to the sin of passivity and choose to remain under a ‘benevolent patriarchy’. They keep a low profile in church affairs and do only what has been asked; they do not

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- 2 Ravi Tiwari, “Women in Manu,” in *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis* (ed. Prasanna Kumari; Chennai: Gurukul L.T.C.& Research Centre, 1999), 132.
 - 3 Vera Agustus, “Women in Indian Society,” in *Feminist Theology* (ed. Prasanna Kumari), 41. See also Felix Wilfred, *Asian Dreams and Christian Hope – At the Dawn of the Millennium* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 145-177.
 - 4 Kiran Prasad, “Contemporary Mass Media and Gender Justice,” *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April-June 2004), 152.

confront unjust situations that lead to their exploitation and fail to claim their rightful place in decision-making bodies.

Nevertheless, today women from all walks of life are forging ahead to reclaim their place in public and private arena. In pursuit of an egalitarian society/religion, women of faith and commitment have begun to challenge sex-gender stereotypes and sexist ideologies that keep women under patriarchal clutches. Various women’s movements and organizations bear witness to women’s vision of a society/religion free from sexism, casteism, classism, communalism and all dehumanizing praxis. Similarly, Christian women have asserted the need for developing a feminist hermeneutics as a challenge to androcentric interpretations of biblical texts and theology.

2. Radicality of Feminist Consciousness and Hermeneutics

Women’s experiences of marginalization and subjugation as well as their struggles for legitimate freedom in all spheres of life, and participatory action for justice are central to feminist consciousness and hermeneutics. We need to stress that ‘women’s experience’ includes the biological and cultural experiences of being female and the feminist experience that calls for equality and inclusiveness of women and men. The awareness of weakness or victimization has a positive effect on women, for it leads to the consciousness of one’s own power. It unfolds the possibility of “personal growth and the release of energy long suppressed”⁵ and motivates the person to engage in direct forms of struggle against an oppressive system. The late Phoolan Devi⁶ and several other women who have become victims of caste

5 Sandra L. Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York : Routledge, 1990), 16. See also Beverly W. Harrison, “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love,” in *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (eds. Judith Plaskow & C.P. Christ; New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), 214-225.

6 Phoolan Devi was shot dead on 25th July 2001 in the highest security zone of the country, New Delhi. “She will always be remembered as the ‘Bandit Queen’: untamed, aggressive, wild. And her life shall be a colourful collage of the Great Indian Story fraught with caste-wars, gender exploitation, blood and gore.” Cited by S. P. Banarjee, “Not a Player but a Plaything,” *Indian Currents* (August 5, 2001), 16.

oppression and who in turn have mobilized their “guilty victim” status to empower others, are typical examples of *victory over victimization*. Feminist consciousness thus poses a challenge to dominant structures and sexist institutions, and proposes a fundamental change in society.

The feminist demand is for a re-structuring of thought and analysis in view of developing a holistic approach to Divine-human realities. With regard to the Bible, it stands as a critique of androcentric biblical interpretations and theological articulations, presented as *eternal* truths. The Bible, written from the socio-cultural perspective of male authors as well as its interpretations, has legitimized women’s subordination in the churches. Women have appeared in patriarchal teachings as types: virgins, temptresses, seducers, but not real women. This experience of stereotype makes women suspect the validity of a ‘biblical revelation’ that has come to us solely through male categories. Therefore, a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ should inform any reading of the biblical texts and commentaries, and reconstruct them in terms of praxis for the liberation of all. As all theological articulations are based on a particular understanding of the Bible, feminist scholars emphasize the need to scrutinize the androcentric and patriarchal/*kyriarchal* elements in biblical texts and retrieve the position of women and their partnership with God in the story of salvation. To put it differently, “the hermeneutical principles that we choose to employ are determined by our theological stands operative in exegesis and interpretation.”⁷

Keeping these introductory remarks on the position of women in our society/religion and on the challenges posed by feminist hermeneutics as a backdrop, we shall delve into the topic of our study. It is divided into three parts, Part I will examine Jesus’ commission to women in the Hebrew context in which, from the juridical point of view, a woman’s witness had no value. Part II will analyze Paul’s ‘offensive text’ on women’s silence from the perspective of his letter

7 M. J. Melanchthon, “Indian Women and the Bible: Some Hermeneutical Issues,” in *Feminist Theology: Perspectives and Praxis* (ed. Prasamma Kumari), 281. For a discussion on ‘hermeneutics’, see Clodovis Boff, “Hermeneutics: Constitution of Theological Pertinency,” in *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah; London: SPCK, 1991), 9-35.

to the Corinthian community. Part III focuses on implications and challenges for today. It is a call to individual and structural transformation of the existing patriarchal ideology with its systemic exclusion of women from positions of leadership in the Church.

Part I. Jesus' Commission to Women

“Go and tell my brothers...” (Mt 28: 10; Jn 20:17). “Go” and “tell” are the two great verbs set in the midst of the first announcement of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus’ choice of women to be the messengers of his resurrection is a recognition of women’s dignity and their role in God’s plan of salvation. It is a fitting tribute to women whose loyalty and devotion to the Master surpassed that of the male disciples.

1. Women at the Tomb

The discipleship of women does not end beneath the cross. They are on a mission to anoint the body of their *guru* (teacher). After the body of Jesus is wrapped and laid in a tomb, “the women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments” (Lk 23: 55-56).

Once the Sabbath is over, women are the first to go to the tomb. The presence of the women at the empty tomb and their being the first witnesses of the resurrection are attested by all four evangelists (Mt 28:1-10; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-11; Jn 20:1-2, 11-18). In contrast to the male disciples who lock themselves up in a room out of fear of the Jews, the fearless women rush to the tomb of their Friend and Master to be the first recipients and messengers of the good news of his resurrection.

The emphasis on the fact that women were witnesses to the Master’s life and ministry from Galilee down to the dramatic events of his crucifixion and death is significant here. This should be seen in the Hebrew context in which, from the juridical point of view, a woman’s witness had no value. Jesus in effect challenged this mentality by bringing women into the most privileged circle of those gathered around him. He made them effective witnesses to his life and message. Francis Pereira accentuates the fact that “in the Synoptic tradition, women are the sole witnesses to the burial of Jesus and ‘only they are brought

into connection with all four stages of the traditional confession preserved in 1 Cor 15:3-5: death, burial, resurrection [= empty tomb], and resurrection appearance.”⁸

The point of the episode, for Matthew, is the message of the angel to the women: “Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed, he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you” (Mt 28:7). As they run in joy and excitement to communicate this, Jesus himself meets them, greets them (vv. 8-9) and confirms them in their mission to be his heralds: “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, there they will see me” (v.10). Matthew avoids all mention of the proof that the tomb was empty. Mark ends his passage with an emphatic statement, “...Terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid” (Mk 16:8). Perhaps he wanted to emphasize that the witness of the disciples was entirely independent of that of the women.

Luke’s account of the empty tomb is different from the narratives of the other evangelists. There is no explicit reference in Luke to women being commissioned to tell the disciples that they will see the risen Jesus in Galilee. Nevertheless, “they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest” (Lk 24:8-9). At this point Luke names the women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, the mother of James. Other women are believed to have been with them (24:10). Mary Magdalene and Joanna appear also in Luke 8:2, and Mary the mother of James in Mk 16:1. Only Mary Magdalene is found associated with the empty tomb in all the four canonical Gospels and in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*.⁹

8 F. Pereira, *Jesus the Human and Humane Face of God: A Portrait of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2000), 167.

9 Jane Schaberg, “Luke,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (eds. Newsom and S.H. Ring; London: SPCK, 1992), 291. For a comprehensive review on the prominent role of Mary Magdalene, see K. L. King, “The Gospel of Mary Magdalene,” in *Searching the Scriptures, Vol. Two: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. Schussler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1994), 601-634.

The fact that Mary Magdalene is constantly placed in the list of the group shows that she is a reference point for the other women. Furthermore, her special relationship with Jesus and probably her personality could have given her some authority over the other women. Her leadership role in the resurrection episode (Mk 16:10; Mt 28:8,10; Lk 24:8-10; Jn 20:17) cannot be disputed. Though her testimony is usually questioned or completely discounted by the male disciples (Mk 16:10; Lk 24: 10-11), at the end, the evangelists uphold her and validate the authority of her witness.¹⁰

Luke concludes his resurrection narrative stating that the report of the women seemed to the apostles "an idle tale" and they did not believe them (24:11). Their faith in the promise of Jesus' resurrection was too weak to believe the message of the women disciples. Theresa Okure attributes their refusal to believe the women's proclamation to cultural conditions; it was not a gospel response.¹¹ No wonder Jesus will later say to them "Oh, how foolish you are, how slow of heart to believe..." (Lk 24:25). It is rather strange that in Luke the risen Jesus does not appear to women. No commission is given to the women to go and tell his disciples that Jesus is risen (cf. Mt 28:7) and/or to tell them to meet him in Galilee (cf. Mk 16:7; Mt 28:10). Instead, they are

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- 10 The Gospel of Peter also gives Mary Magdalene a pre-eminent place as the first witness to the empty tomb, although the material about Mary may be a second-century tradition, influenced by the canonical gospel tradition. See also E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York : Crossroad , 1983), 332-333.
 - 11 T. Okure, "Contemporary Perspectives on Women in the Bible," *Word & Worship*, Vol.33, Nos.2 & 3 (March-April & May-June 2000), 102. The motif of the apostles' scepticism toward the message of the women is even further developed in the *Epistula Apostolorum*, an apocryphal document of the second century. According to this account Mary Magdalene and Sarah (in the Coptic version it is Martha and Mary) are sent to announce to the apostles that Jesus had risen. But the apostles did not believe them. Finally, the Lord himself goes with Mary and her sisters to them, but they still do not believe. Only after they touch him do they know "that he has truly risen in the flesh." See Hennecke and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. I, 195ff. This information has been gathered from E. Schüssler Fiorenza in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (eds. R.R Ruether et al.; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 52.

reminded of how Jesus told them about his suffering, crucifixion and resurrection (Lk 24:6-7). Their eye-witness does not seem essential to the Christian faith because they are treated like minors. Seim makes an interesting observation:

In the story of the empty tomb in Luke 24:1-10, it becomes clear how certain factors operate in silencing women. The peculiar Lukan version of this story may help to explain the remarkable gap between the Gospel's emphasis on the role of women on the one side and on the other side Acts' reduction of them to invisibility in favour of the healing and preaching activity of the leading men. By the use of almost ironic devices, the women become simultaneously recognized and rejected.¹²

In his resurrection narrative John combines the tradition of the empty tomb with that of the resurrection appearances. While the Synoptic gospels record the presence of several women at the tomb (Mt 23: 1; Mk 16: 2; Lk 24:1), John makes no reference to other women except Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:1). However, Mary herself gives us a cue to the presence of other women in verse 2: "We do not know where they have laid him." It is John alone who describes vividly Mary's encounter with the risen Christ (Jn 20: 1-18).

2. Women as Witnesses

The episode of the empty tomb is ignored in the preaching of the early church; nor does it appear in the letters of Paul or in the Acts of the Apostles. The Apostles' proclamation of the resurrection is based on the positive evidence of eyewitnesses of the risen Christ rather than the negative evidence of the empty tomb (1 Cor 15:3-7). Their silence on the episode of the empty tomb may be due to the fact that the witnesses were women, whose testimony was not valid according to the Jewish law. The criterion of maleness in Acts 1:21 excludes women from testifying to the resurrection of Jesus.

Whatever be the prejudice against the women disciples, the fact is that they were the first to hear the news: "He is risen!" Though

12 T. K. Seim, "The Gospel of Luke," in *Searching the Scriptures* (ed. E. Schussler Fioreza), 748.

culturally women’s testimony had no legal standing, Jesus acted counter-culturally when he made women’s witness as the bedrock of Christian faith (cf. 1 Cor 15:7). Not only Mary Magdalene, but also the other women witnesses of the resurrection can be called apostles. Jesus commissioned them as a group: “Go and tell”(Mt 28:10). Indeed, the women who figure in the resurrection stories are models of true discipleship. They could rightly say, “We declared to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 Jn 1:3)

To sum up, the above reflections reiterate our conviction that far from sidelining women disciples, Jesus accepted their partnership and leadership in his mission. Most amazing of all, the risen Jesus entrusted to them the resurrection kerygma (*kerugma*) upon which the church was founded (Jn 20:11-18; cf. Mk 16:9& Mt 28:9-10). In the light of Jesus’ empowering attitude towards women disciples, we shall proceed to examine Paul’s ‘offensive’ statement on women’s silence.

Part II. Paul’s Injunctions to Women

There are six major texts that directly address the question of the role of men and women. They are:

1 Cor 11:2-16	Eph 5:22-33
1 Cor 14:26-40	Col 3:18-19
1 Tim 2:8-15	1Pet 3: 1-7

In addition, two minor texts provide instructional material for the roles of men and women: 1 Tim 5:1-2 and Tit 2:1-6.

The most ‘offensive’ among them, namely 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 1 Cor 14:26-40, believed to be authentically Pauline, merit close attention, as they refer explicitly to women’s role in the ecclesial community. Besides, the misinterpretation of these texts from the patristic era even to this day has helped in the downgrading of women. Our focus in this paper is women’s silence in the church.

1. Women should keep silence (1 Cor 14:26-40; cf. 1 Tim 2:11-12)

In this passage as in 1Cor 11: 2-16 (women’s head-covering), Paul’s main concern is discipline and order in liturgical assemblies. The whole

chapter deals with the subject of corporate worship in the Christian church. Most of chapter 14, especially from v.26, contains a set of rules on “speaking in tongues and prophesying” to ensure that there is no disorder in the assemblies. Towards the end of the letter, Paul writes:

As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate (*hypotassesthosan*), as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church (1Cor 14:34-35)

We shall make a simple survey of 14:26-36 and pick up the three main rules applicable to three categories of people.

vv. 27-28 rules for glossolalists

vv. 29-33 rules for prophets

vv. 34-36 rules for wives

These are formulated in a structurally similar fashion:¹³

vv. 27, 29, 34 – general sentences of regulation

vv. 28, 30, 35 – complementary sentences for concretization

vv. 31-32, 34a, 35b – expanded reasons for regulation

v. 36 – containing a double rhetorical question

Once again, as in chapter 11, we have Paul insisting on the maintenance of a Jewish-Christian custom, and as in the previous case, it is a custom, which was in fact congruent with a Greek custom. Prejudices against women were strong. In Periclean Athens, a woman's place was primarily in the home, and her main social obligation was to keep silent and least talked about: “... The greatest glory of a woman is to be least talked about by men whether they are praising you or criticizing you.”¹⁴ It was not customary for men to talk to women in public.¹⁵

13 Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (NY: Crossroad, 1983), 230.

14 C.M. Bowra, *Classical Greece* (Amsterdam : Time-Life Books, 1965), 95.

15 See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 360. Among the Jews of that time, men were strongly discouraged from speaking

It is generally believed that in places of worship (synagogues), women were segregated from men, but the evidence for this is not conclusive, and it has recently been argued that initially men and women worshipped together.¹⁶ Men seemed to have been frequently interrupted by their wives with questions, which would better be answered at home. Deprived of adequate learning in religious matters, most women probably found it difficult to grasp the interpretations of Scripture given at meetings. Obviously they sought for clarifications, and preferably from their own husbands (v.35).

A study by J. Jeremias¹⁷ reveals that schools were only meant for boys. A woman was educated merely in household tasks that would enable her to serve man's needs. Jose C. Pallares describes the situation as follows:

It was commonly held that women were incapable of observing the commandments, in as much as they were considered to lack the capacity for schooling (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 33 b). They were not taught the scriptures. Indeed Rabbi Eliezer, toward the end of the first century, stated: "Any one schooling his daughter in the Torah is schooling her in its abuse" (Jeremias 1977, 383, n. 128, citing Sota 3). Small wonder, then, that Rabbi Judah Ben Ilay prayed: "Praise be (O Lord), that thou didst not make me a woman!" (Leipoldt and Grundmann 1973, 191, citing Tosefta Berakot 7:19).¹⁸

in public to women. No wonder the disciples were surprised when they saw Jesus talking to a woman (Jn 4:27).

- 16 Ruth B. Edwards is of the opinion that no biblical or rabbinic text prescribes the separation of women and men in worship. See Edwards, *The Case for Women's Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1989), esp. 23-38. Brooten argues that archaeological remains from early synagogues show no evidence (such as galleries) for it. However, separation eventually became customary. See B. J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1982), 103-138.
- 17 Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (trans. F. H. & C. H. Cave; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 374-384.
- 18 J. C. Pallares, *A Poor Man Called Jesus: Reflections on the Gospel of Mark* (Indore: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1986), 53.

The injunction prohibiting women to study the Torah creates the paradoxical result that "on the one hand, since the study of the Torah is always meritorious, women are rewarded for its study (though to a lesser degree than men since they are not divinely commanded to do so) and, on the other, they are in practice discouraged from such study."¹⁹ It represents an ideology that marriage and child bearing are women's appropriate sphere of activity, and not the study of the Torah.

We note that Paul's main concern here (1 Cor 14) is discipline in the Corinthian church. The various charismas, such as speaking in tongues (v.26), gift of interpretation (v.26), prophecy (v.29) and all other gifts (1 Cor 12) are for the edification (v.26) of the community. "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (v. 26 b-c). Every gift is to be used in the service of the Lord and for building up of his body, the church. Silence and listening are integral parts of Christian worship: "for God is a God not of disorder but of peace" (v. 33).

Regrettably, Paul's injunction in verses 34-35 is reinforced in 1 Tim 2:11-14 with an emphatic statement: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent..." A woman was advised to learn "in silence with full submission" (1 Tim 2:11). Certain conservatives in the past used these admonitions against women to prevent them from imparting religious instruction and pursuing theological studies, just as those who interpreted 1 Tim 2:9 literally and argued that "women should not braid their hair, nor wear gold or pearls or expensive clothing."²⁰

Several scholars are of the view that verses 34-35 are an insertion into the Pauline corpus. H. Conzelmann believes that the directives to women to keep silence in the church represent a later interpolation that cannot be attributed to Paul, precisely because it contradicts the spirit of 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, where the active participation of

19 Edith. Wyschogrod, "Women in Judaism: Toward a Universal Humanity" in *Women and Religion* (ed. Regina Col; New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 84.

20 Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 40.

women is presupposed.²¹ In this regulation we hear an echo of the pastoral letters, originated in the Deutero-Pauline circles (cf. 1 and 2 Timothy & Titus).

N.M. Flanagan and E. H. Snyder are of the opinion that verses 33b-35 are not Paul's words but rather a quotation from the letter the Corinthians had written to him.²² Paul quotes many sayings of the Corinthians in his letter (1Cor 1:1; 2:15; 6:12-13). Thus verses 33b-35 may also be a quotation, introduced there in order to curtail women's activities in the church. In fact, this view falls in line with Paul's mention about women prophesying in church (1Cor 11:5) and his liberative vision in Gal 3:28.

Following the same trend of thought, Peter F. Ellis suspects that the ruling on women's silence originates from certain conservatives in the Corinthian church. Paul cannot be held responsible for the harsh words of verses 33b-35. The appeal to the law "even as the law says" (v.34) sounds rather strange as coming from the mind of Paul.²³ Based on v.36 that says "are you the only ones," the words "only ones" *masculine* in Greek, Ellis suggests that the passage could be translated as follows: "As in all churches of the saints, the women (you say) should keep silence in the churches.... What! Did the word of God originate with you (men) or are you (men) the only ones it has reached?"²⁴

The findings of the scholars agree with the commonly held belief that the ruling in verses 34-35 contradicts 11:5 where women are allowed to pray and prophesy. Added to the difficulty is the strange appeal in 14:34b, "just as the law says." Presumably, the Mosaic Law is intended here. Paul seems to be referring to Gen 3:16 which confirms

21 H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1975), 246. See also W.O. Walker Jr., "1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Women," *JBL* 94 (March 1975), 94-110.

22 N. M. Flanagan and E.H. Snyder, "Did Paul Put Down Women in 1 Cor 14:34-36?," *BTB* (January 1981), 10-12.

23 For further details, see Peter F. Ellis, *Seven Pauline Letters* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1984), 103.

24 *Ibid.*, 103

the husband's rule over his wife. But there is no requirement of a silence here. Moreover, it is hardly in keeping with the principle and practice of prophecy in the early church. Acts 21:8-9 give evidence of women prophesying: "...and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy" (cf. Joel 2:28-29).

The question still remains: Are verses 34-35 an interpolation? The answer would be 'no', for the simple reason that all important manuscripts contain these verses. We find strong internal evidence for asserting the authenticity of verses 34-35 as Pauline teaching.²⁵ Does it mean that Paul was a male chauvinist? How do we reconcile his liberative stand in Gal 3:26-29 with his conservative position in Corinthians?

The answer is to be found within the context of 1 Cor 11 and 14. We have already seen that Paul's instruction pertained to order and discipline in public worship. Whatever hinders his missionary activity should be checked. Wherever disorder and confusion exists, restrictions ought to be imposed. The operative principle behind Paul's admonition to silence is his genuine concern for "building up the church" (14:12). Paul's restrictions were aimed at correcting improprieties and not placing a blanket ban on women evangelizing or teaching.

Interestingly, it is not just women who are banned from speaking, men too are called to be silent at certain times (vv. 28-30). Verse 26 states the indispensable principle: "Let all things be done for building up." There is absolutely no suggestion there that only male members of the community have the monopoly of the gifts of the Spirit. The phrase *hekastos* "each one" in verse 26, though masculine in form (unavoidable in a patriarchal set-up), is applied to both men and women. Paul's presupposition is that each person has something to contribute to the growth of the community.

25 See Kurt Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd edition (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), 611. See also the scholarly work of John Wijngaards, *The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church – Unmasking a Cuckoo's Egg Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 2001), 83.

At this juncture, it should be highlighted that the original Greek word, *gynaikes*, actually means 'wives' and not all women, because this command was given to those women who had husbands. Moreover, it is wrong to make this situation-bound instruction into a general universal rule to suppress women's right to speak. As Hyunju Bae observes, "the command to ask the husbands at home signifies the strengthening of the typical private/public dualism espoused by patriarchy, which assigns the place for women and feminine gender to the private realm."²⁶ Undoubtedly, Paul, a man of his time, was not totally free from the biases of his male-dominated cultural code which was so effectively used to control women's behaviour (1 Cor 11:6; 14:35).

To sum up, the injunction imposing silence on woman in 1 Corinthians, like all others, may be understood and interpreted in the light of its context and purpose. Faced with the threat of legalism on the one hand (Gal 1:1-2:10; 3:1-5) and libertinism on the other (Gal 3:26-28), Paul appears to be in a state of contradiction. The concept of the equality of women and men as we understand and advocate it today was not an issue for him. Moreover, several of Paul's disciplinary declarations were sociological in nature and not doctrinal. Considering Paul's attitude towards women elsewhere in the churches, he cannot be labelled as a male chauvinist, enjoining silence and subordination upon women in the Corinthian church. Chapter 16 of Romans gives us a vivid description of Paul's association with prominent women leaders (e.g. Phoebe, Prisca/Priscilla, Junia, Mary, Tryphoena and Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, Nereus' sister and Rufus' mother) who are not the passive type to keep silence in the church.

We are certain that Paul allowed women to speak prophetically in the assembly (1 Cor. 11:5); women functioned as deacons in the church (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-12). Therefore we can deduce that women did speak in the assemblies. Biblical scholar John Wijngaards offers an

26 Hyunju Bae, "Women's Leadership and Authority in Pauline Christianity," in *Telling Her Story: Introduction to Asian Feminist Re-reading of History* - Book 2 (Kuala Lumpur: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 2006), 50.

insightful piece of information: "The immediate context of the prohibition was the danger of Gnostic teaching that at the time affected mainly women. Enlarging its purpose to include a permanent norm for all time goes beyond the literal sense of the text and the intended scope of the biblical author."²⁷ His comparative study of 1 Cor 11:35 and 1 Tim 2:12 sheds further light on women's silence:

Although in 1 Timothy 2:12 the author used *didaskein* (teaching), while in 1 Corinthians 11:35 the word used is *lalein* (speaking), the parallelism of the two texts on women's/wives' restrictions is generally accepted by scholars. Probably 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 stems from a similar origin to 1 Timothy 2:11-14 – that is, an effort in Asia Minor of around AD 100 to counteract the Gnostic recruitment of women.²⁸

Part III. Implications and Challenges

It is time that women developed feminist hermeneutical tools for relevant Bible studies. God's Word is liberative and empowering, not enslaving and dehumanizing. However, it comes to us mediated by human realities: human beings, languages and thought patterns which are conditioned by their particular age and culture. Hence we should be cautious so as not to be victimized by the androcentric and sexist elements in biblical texts. On the contrary, we ought to challenge the male-defined and culture-bound interpretations which ignore the experiences of women and legitimize their low status in church and society.

If Paul were alive today, what would he say with regard to women's roles and status in church and society? Would he, who declared the freedom and oneness of all in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26-28), not correct antifeminist theologians and pastors who invoke his authority in favour of female subordination in the church? Presumably Paul would rewrite those texts dealing with the roles of women and men in order to admonish contemporary Christians, in particular the official teachers, to apply the gospel principles and the liberative praxis of Jesus in their

27 John Wijngaards, *The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church*, 81.

28 *Ibid.*, 83.

interpretations. S. Wesley Ariarajah has done just this in an imaginative and lively version of what contemporary Paul might say to clarify what he meant and to chastise those who have distorted his letters.²⁹

1. Challenges to Church Leadership

Today when women have proven their effective leadership in many areas in the secular sphere, Church authorities are called to further the full and equal rights of Christian women in all aspects of the Church's mission. There is no dearth of theologically qualified women in today's Church. According to Jesus' standard, eligibility for ministry is determined not in terms of gender roles but in accordance with God's choice of persons, considering their particular charisma and leadership qualities. The author of the letter to the Hebrews spells out the criteria for a minister (Heb 5: 1-10). There is no fundamental biblical or theological objection to women preaching or teaching in the Church. In the words of G. H. Tavard, "a purely canonical argument can never be ultimate in theological field. What has never been done can still be done if good reasons militate in its favour."³⁰ It is time the hierarchy and the laity acknowledged that the Church has been impoverished because the faithful are deprived of feminine insights and perspectives in official teachings and ministries, especially at liturgical celebrations, where they gather in large numbers.

The Church leadership is called to recapture the original vision and praxis of Jesus and the liberative thrust of Paul, and move towards the realization of a community of 'discipleship of equals' (Mt 23: 9-10). The differentiation of the role of sexes in keeping with the socio-cultural perceptions of male-centred societies has been contingent on a given historical situation; one cannot deduce from it a divine, immutable model that would apply to different circumstances. We have underscored the truth that Jesus commissioned women to proclaim the good news of his resurrection/liberation to all. Grappling with the Pauline injunction to women, we unearthed the disciplinary nature of Paul's instruction

29 Wesley Ariarajah, *Did I Betray the Gospel: The Letters of Paul and The Place of Women* (Geneva: WCC, 1996).

30 George H. Tavard, *Woman in Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 213.

on the one hand, and on the other, his association with leading women who served as deacons, itinerant preachers and apostolic envoys of various local churches.³¹

The institutional Church that claims to champion the cause of Human Rights including women's empowerment in all aspects (*Gaudium et Spes* 29, 8, 9, 60) would do well to retrieve the teaching and practice of Jesus and Paul and allow feminine potential to enliven and rejuvenate its existence. The exclusion of women from official ministries solely on the basis of sex is incompatible with the Christian principle of the equality and oneness of all the baptized in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:26-28). Church leaders should call into question the contradiction between the theological interpretations of ministry as service and the practices of clerical privilege and exclusion. The recent statements by United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights may serve as a challenge to Church personnel: "Our main objective is to help promote discrimination-free societies and a world of equal treatment for all... Human Rights work prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, gender, religion or social origin, disability, property, birth or other status."³²

2. Women's Commitment

Women have a specific contribution to make in liberating the structures of the Church from the constraints of patriarchal ideology and theology operative in ministry, liturgy and leadership. They can no longer afford to be the *silent* and *silenced* half in the Church. Women must realistically face the fact that breaking the silence and becoming visible in Church and society is a gigantic task, demanding constant straining forward. As Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza rightly observes, "In so far as religious language and symbol systems function to legitimate the societal oppression and cultural marginality of women, the struggle

31 For a comprehensive view, see Susan Smith, "Women: Coworkers and Apostles with Paul," *The Bible Today*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (March/April 2008), 93-98. See also Rekha Chennattu, "Paul's Understanding of Women's Place in the Church," *Jnanadeepa: Pune Journal of Religious Studies* 12(2009), 261-79.

32 Navi Pillay, "UN Human Rights Day 2009," *The Examiner*, Vol. 160, No. 49 (Decemebr 5, 2009), 6.

against ecclesiastical silencing and ecclesial invisibility is at the heart of women's struggle for justice, liberation and wholeness."³³ Rooted in Christ and energized by the Spirit, women can overcome hurdles of every kind and become agents of individual and structural transformation. Like our foresisters /foremothers in the faith, today's women shall function as powerful witnesses and spokespersons of God's liberative action in favour of the voiceless and the marginalized.

Conclusion

The New Testament presents the call of Jesus to discipleship and to ministerial service as universally inclusive. They were not restricted by sex, marital status, social class, race or nationality. On the contrary, as Joan Chittister observes, "The Jesus born of a woman without the agency of a man defies in that very generation all the dualism, hierarchy, domination, and inequality practiced in his name."³⁴ Although much of women's history in the early church has been submerged, it is remarkable that not a single story or statement is transmitted in which Jesus would affirm the subjugation of women under patriarchal norms. The inclusion of women in the leadership of early Christian community was indeed a break from the Jewish tradition of the role of women.

All too often Pauline texts on women have been locked out of their contexts, and applied to totally different situations or issues, which lie beyond their concern. It is amazing to note how Pauline authority has been invoked in favour of female domestication in the churches through the centuries. Reading Paul out of his specific context, patriarchal patterns from the dominant culture obscured Paul's view of the equality and oneness of all in Christ (Gal 3:28). Consequently, "submission, silence and subordination became watchwords for Christian women...."³⁵ This has not only deteriorated women's position but also

33 E. Schussler Fioranza, "Breaking the Silence – Becoming Visible," in *Women - Invisible in Theology and Church* (eds. E. Schussler Fioranza and Mary Collins; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1985), 14.

34 J. Chittister, *Heart of Flesh – A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Michigan: W.B.Erdmans, 1998), 25.

35 William G. Thomson, *Paul and His Message for Life's Journey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 151.

contributed to the development of a patriarchal theology as exemplified in the teachings of the prominent Christian thinkers in the patristic era.³⁶

The distorted portrayal of women in religious and secular writings has led women to accept the myth of male superiority and female inferiority. The inequality between women and men in India is so structured and stereotyped that it has become an essential part of Indian culture and ethos. Silent suffering, patient endurance, slavish obedience and self-sacrifice have been portrayed as womanly virtues that every woman should emulate and nurture. Consequently the very consciousness of women has been domesticated. The vast majority of women in our country continue to be mute witnesses to or even willing participants in their own and their daughters' and daughters-in-law's exploitation and discrimination.

It is imperative that the position of women in today's Church together with its misogynist theology and biblical interpretation may be subjected to a thoroughgoing revision. By imbibing the spirit of Jesus and Paul, the Church can liberate itself from its ideological fetters. Empowered by the Spirit of God, we are to move away from the emphasis on orders and divine unchanging patterns of Church life towards an emphasis on an organization that seeks to be faithful to the mission of Christ in ever changing contexts.

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36 For a brief discussion on this topic, see Pauline Chakkalakal, *Discipleship -A Space for Women's Leadership ? - A Feminist Theological Critique* (Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2004), 60-72.